AMERICAN**VIOLA**SOCIETY

THREE DUOS
ON PERSIAN DASTGÂHS
FOR TWO VIOLAS

Jon Jeffrey Grier
(b. 1953)

AVS PUBLICATIONS 075

Three Duos on Persian Dastgâhs

Jon Jeffrey Grier

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for Two Violas (2021)

Program Notes

The concept of *dastgâh* in Persian classical music is not directly analogous to the Western concept of scale or mode, though they can – within limits – be written in Western notation as such. The system more resembles other ancient musics of Greece, Arabia, and India, and Persian music includes significant influences from all of these. Much like an Indian *raga* or Arabic *maqam*, each *dastgâh* is a pitch set with a lot of musical baggage: a finalis, a secondary ending tone (*ist*), a starting pitch (*âqâz*), an established set of melodic motives used in improvisation (*guša*), and rules of modulating to other *dastgâhs* or related sub-modes (*âes*). Some of the *dastgâhs* have generally agreed upon expressive modes for which they are considered appropriate, and several include pitches that are a quarter-tone flat (*koron*) in Western measurement; these can be varied somewhat by the performer. Some *dastgâhs* are much more distinguished by their *gušas* than by their pitch content. Persian melody tends to be busy, with much improvised ornamentation. Meters are variable, with much use of 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, 5/4, 5/8, 6/8, and 7/8 in various beat groupings.

This music is admittedly more Western than Persian. The *dastgâhs* are treated essentially in the Western manner, as scales offering limitless options. Quarter-flats are treated as Western half-step flats. The melodic lines do not always have the character of improvisation and there is plenty of counterpoint not typical of Persian music. Many musical choices have been made for only their inherent appeal. On the other hand, the pitch content of the modes has been adhered to rather strictly and each movement strives for a mood that would be considered appropriate to that mode in Persian musical thinking. Also authentic is a penchant in melodic lines for repeated notes, repetitions of short motives, and general busy-ness. Frequent *glissandi* and emphases on dissonant pitches are loosely analogous to Persian practices.

Procured and prepared by Tanya Solomon, Chair of the Scores Committee for the American Viola Society.

I. Lamentation Homâyûn – The *dastgâh Homâyûn* in Persian music is used to elicit feelings of deep mourning or pathos in the listener. It is generally spelled G - A¼♭ - B - C - D - E♭ - F - G; here the A is a ½ step flat, yielding a scale sometimes called phrygian dominant. Some common Persian meters are used. Here I imagine a state of deep sorrow alternating between quiet but obsessive brooding and convulsive outbursts.

II. Reverie Navâ – The *dastgâh Navâ* is generally spelled D - E¼♭ - F - G - A - B♭ - C – D. With E♭ as the *ist*, F as the *âqâz*, and G as the finalis, implications of lydian, mixolydian, and aoelian modes are possible. In Persian music the *dastgâh Navâ* is expressive of serenity and introspection, which is the intent here. This movement is the most thoroughly Persian in character; many melodies begin on F (*âqâz*) and have an insistent, ornamented character reminiscent of the Persian singing style. Most lines cadence on G (*finalis*) or E♭ (*ist*), and it has a typical A-B-A' form. Much of the outer (A) sections are in typical rhythm - nearly meter-less - and are designed to project the impression of two players improvising at once.

III. Cajun Mâhûr – The *dastgâh Mâhûr* is considered to be generally energetic and cheerful. It is typically spelled G - A - B - C - D - E - F - G - A - B¼♭, with the B a quarter step lower in the upper octave; here of course the B is a full ½ step flat, making Western mixolydian and dorian modes on G possible. Many Persian compositions in *Mâhûr* include a modulation to *Delkaš*, a contrasting mode that adds A¼♭... which accounts for the occasional A♭'s employed here. This movement adheres to the cheerful stereotype of *Mâhûr*, with the frequent use of uninhibited figures & gestures reminiscent of Cajun or bluegrass fiddling, including a brief fiddlers' duel in bars 55-58.

Interpretive Suggestions

I. Lamentation Homâyûn – Maintain a steady, unwavering and motoric pulse throughout. *Glissando* indications that connect only to the second note are *portamenti*, swooped up (or down) at the last instant. In bars 5, 8, and 39, make the *sul ponicelli* as thin and raspy as possible, even to the point of the fundamental disappearing. Many dynamic changes are stark and sudden; be sure to execute these precisely.

II. Reverie Navâ – In this movement the exact rhythms are less important than the general effect of highly ornamented chanting. The sense of pulse will be appropriately faint in the outer sections; bars 19-35 should sound more of a steady pulse. To imagine singing the melodic lines should help in effective performance; coordinating the parts may be facilitated by reading from the score. Be sure to make the most of dynamics and colorful effects; further improvised ornamentation is encouraged.

III. Cajun Mâhûr – Play in rock-steady meter throughout, with a let's-all-have-a-party enthusiasm. Energy is valued above elegant tone. Improvised *glissandi* and other ornamentations typical of the style are encouraged. The lead line trades off frequently between the parts, so take care to observe the dynamics that support this.

About the Composer...

Jon Jeffrey Grier holds a B.A. from Kalamazoo College, where he studied composition with Lawrence Rackley, an M.M. in Composition from Western Michigan University, studying with Ramon Zupko, and an M.M. in Theory and a D.M.A. in Composition from the University of South Carolina, where he studied with Jerry Curry, Dick Goodwin and Sam Douglas. Jon taught Advanced Placement Music Theory and Music History at the Greenville Fine Arts Center, a magnet school of the arts in Greenville, SC from 1988 to 2019, where he was named Teacher of the Year three times. Awards include grants from ASCAP, the Surdna Foundation, the South Carolina Music Teachers Association, the Metropolitan Arts Council, and the Atlanta Chamber Players. Jon has also been a writer/keyboardist in various jazz & fusion ensembles since 1984. He lives in Greenville with wife Marion and Carolina dingo Roxanne.

I. Lamentation Homâyûn

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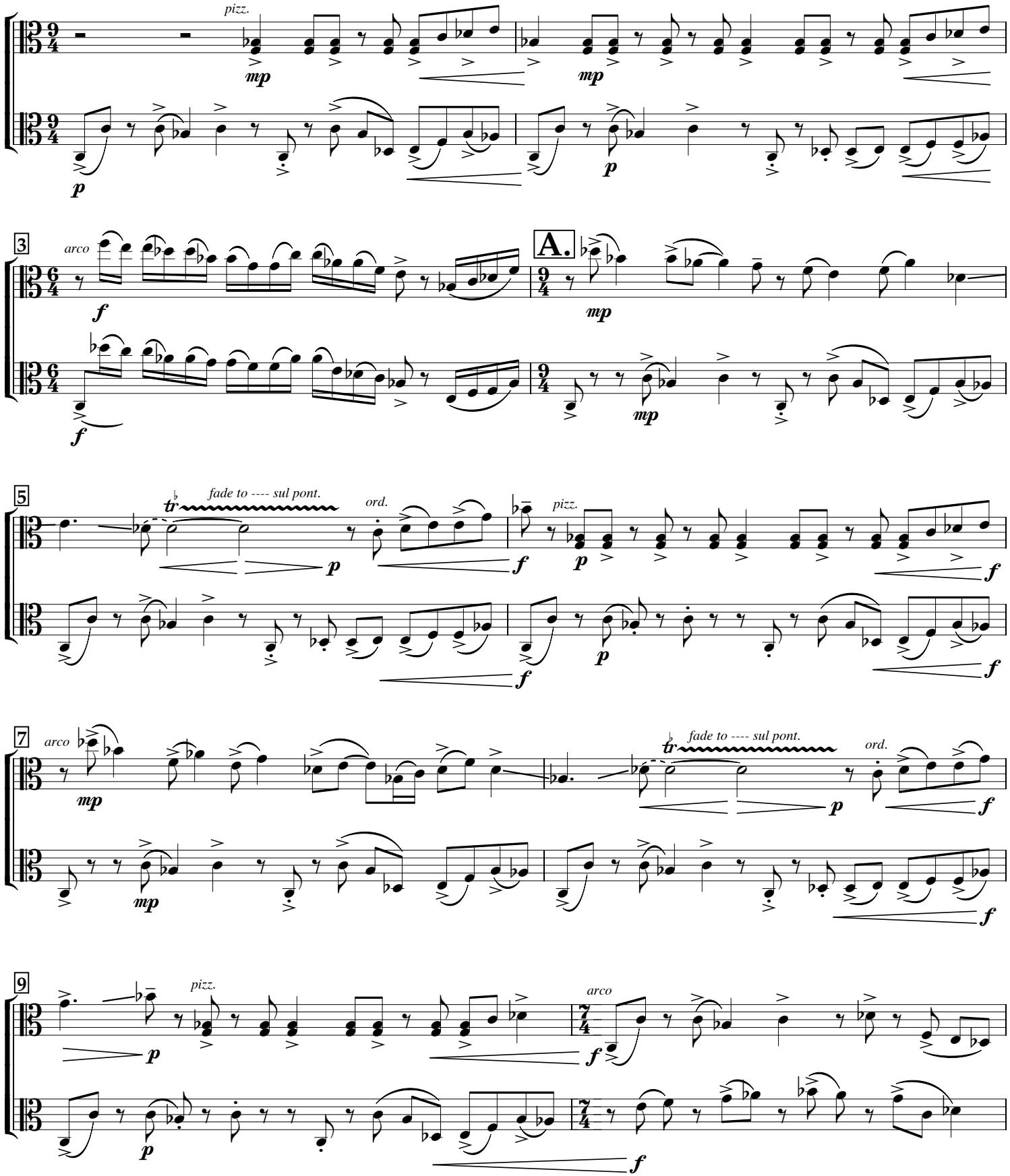
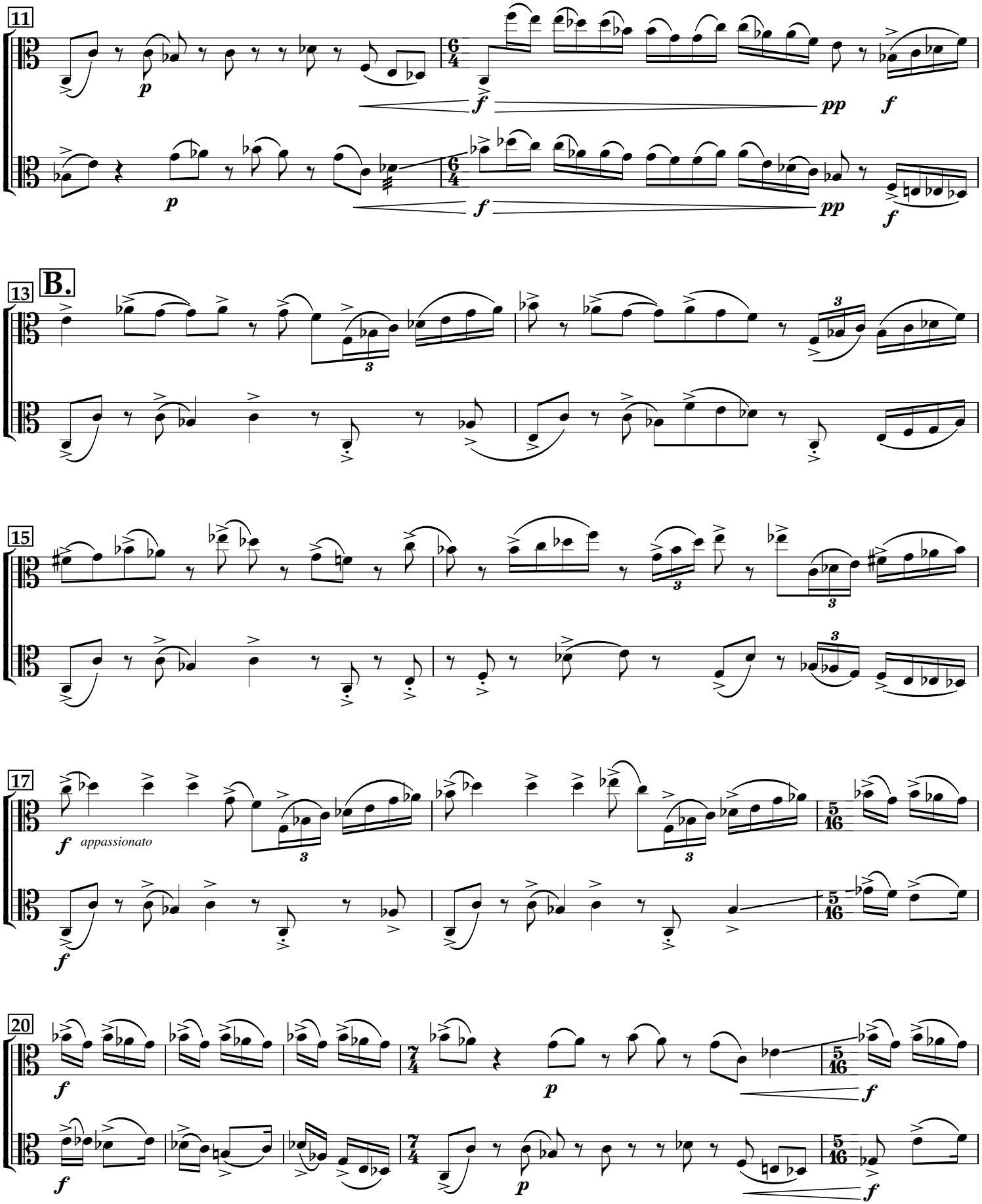
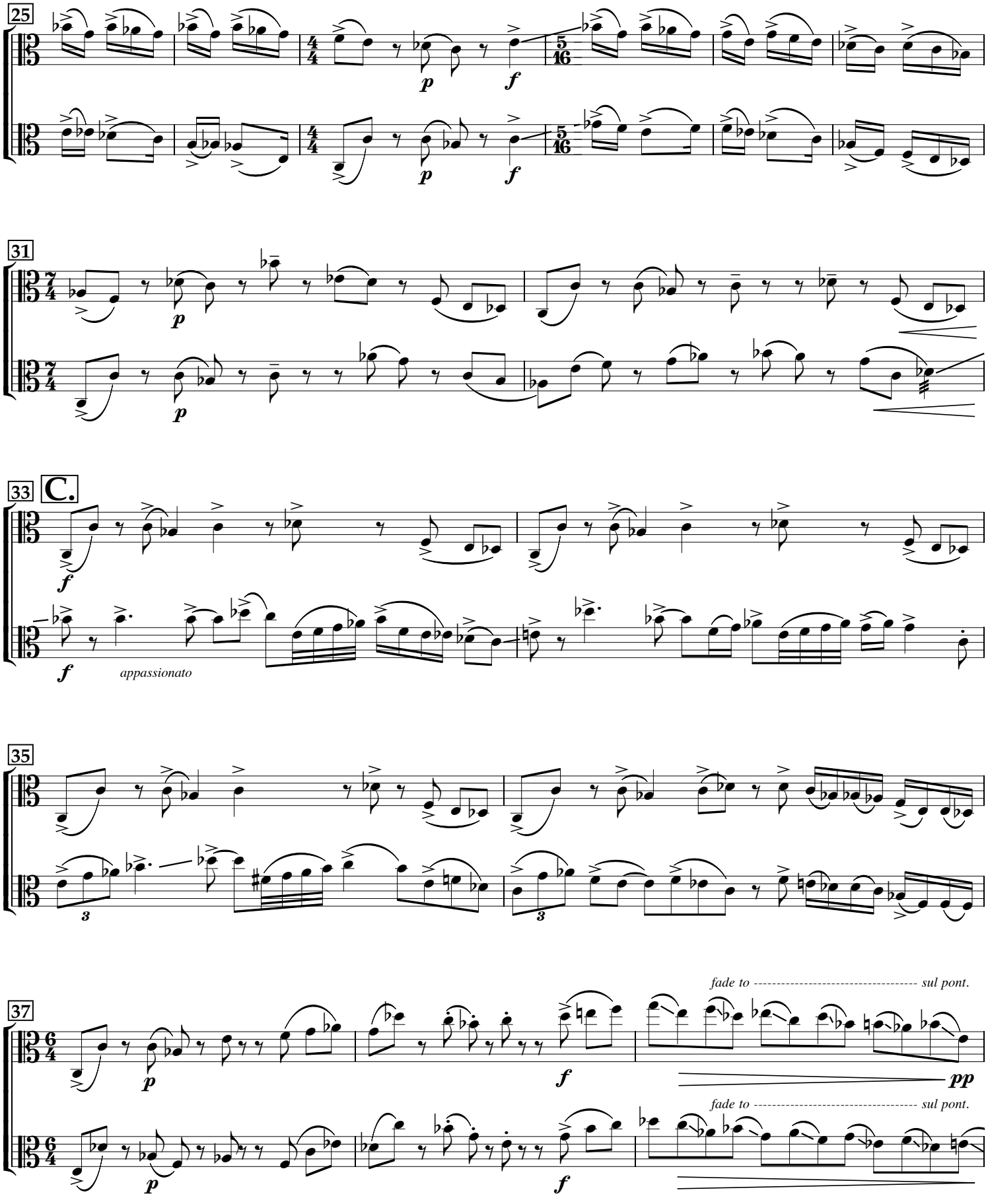
Jon Jeffrey Grier

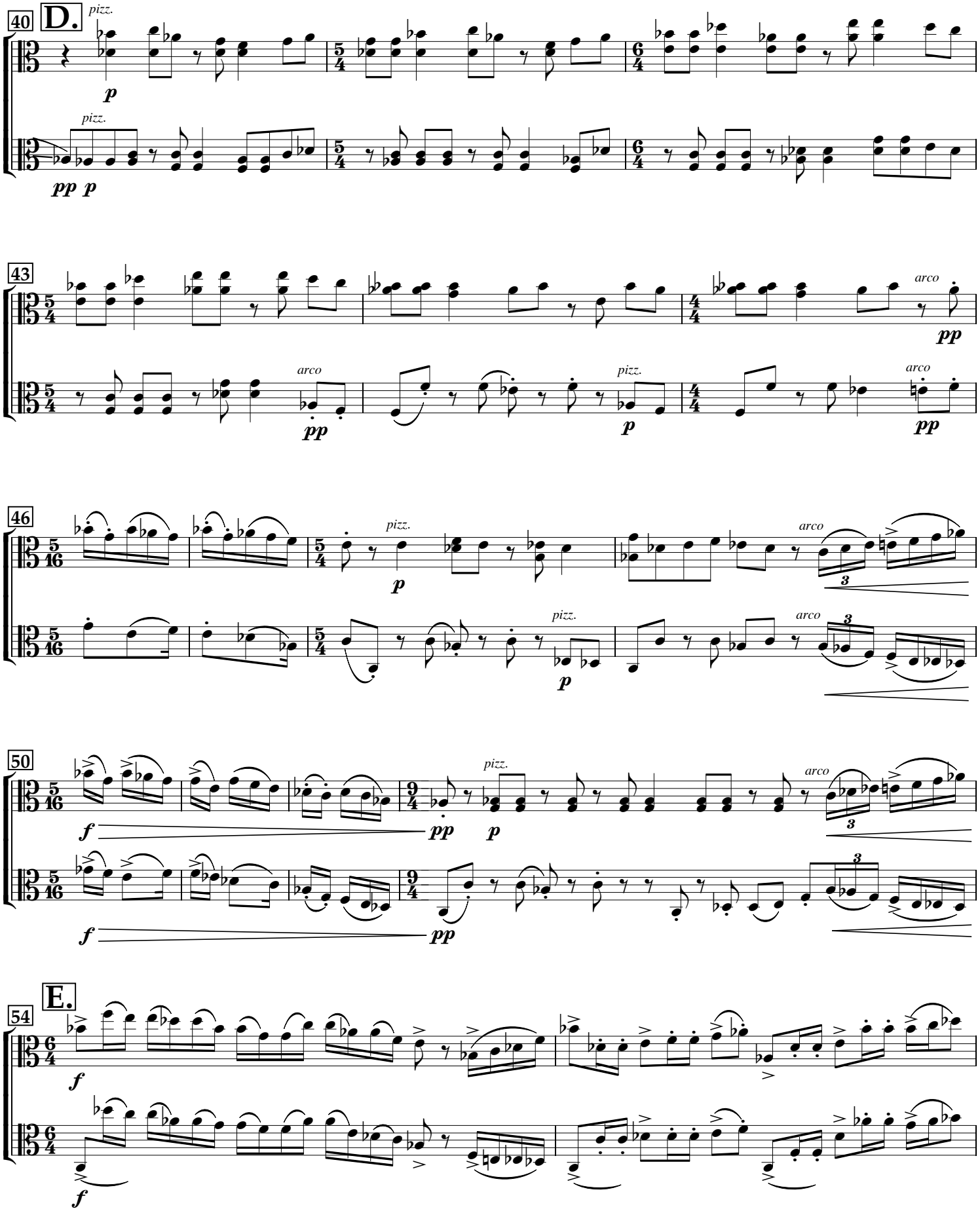
Misterioso ♩=100



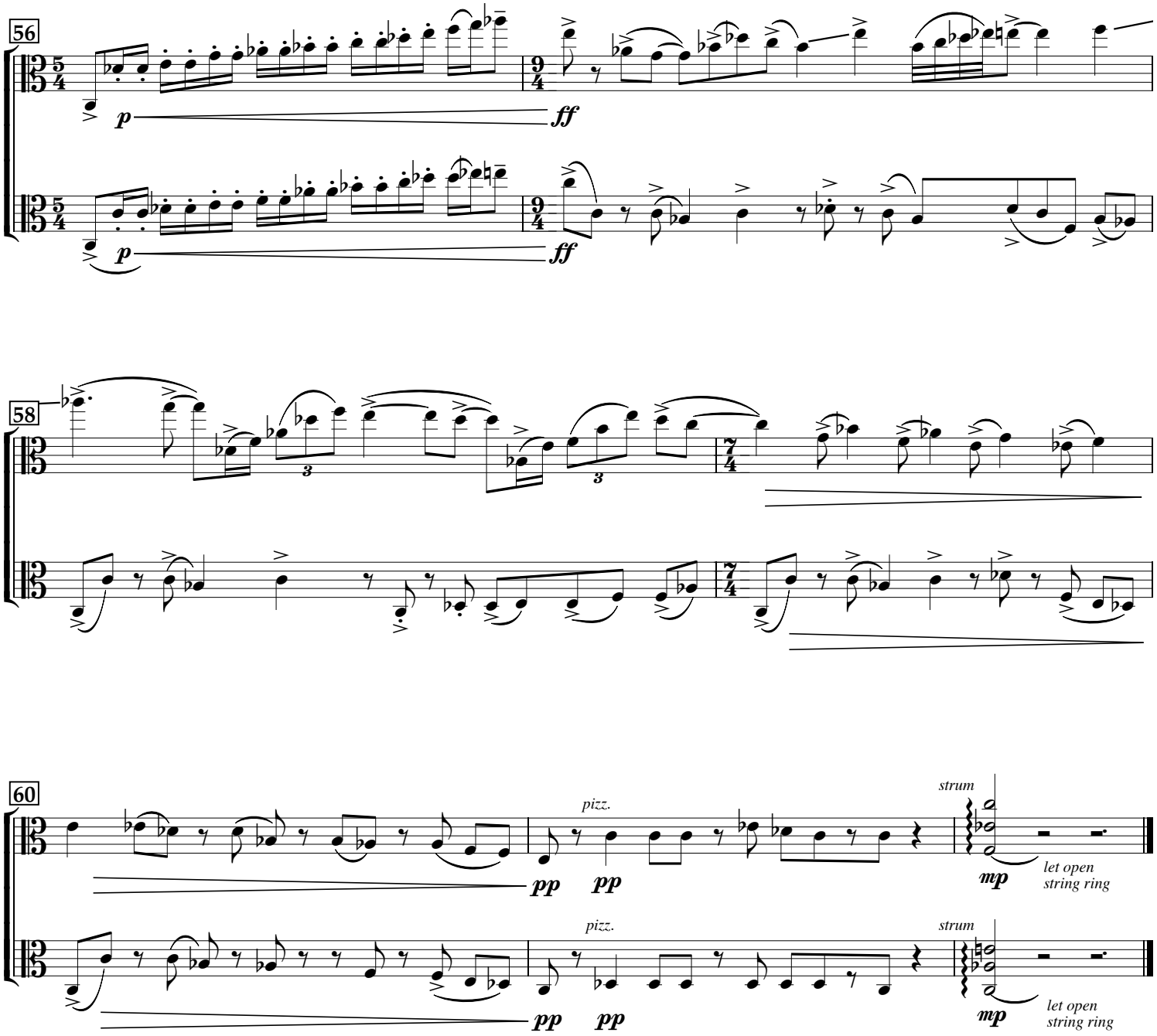
I. Lamentation, p.2




25
31
33
C.
appassionato
35
37
fade to sul pont.
fade to sul pont.


40
D.
pizz.
p
pizz.
pp p
43
arco
pp
pizz.
p
arco
pp
arco
46
pizz.
p
arco
3
pizz.
p
arco
3
50
f
pizz.
pp
p
arco
3
f
pp
3
54
E.
f
f

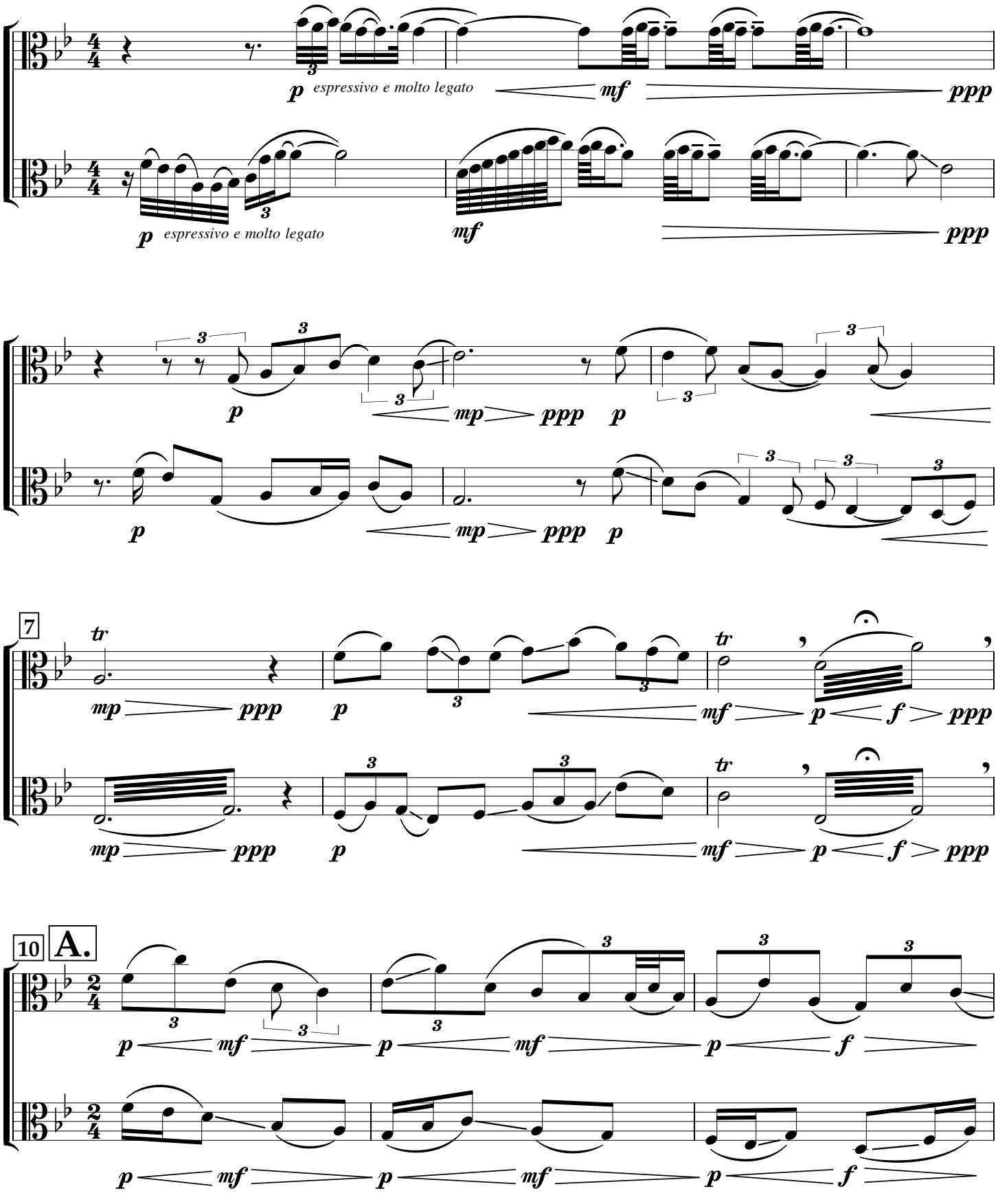
I. Lamentation, p.5

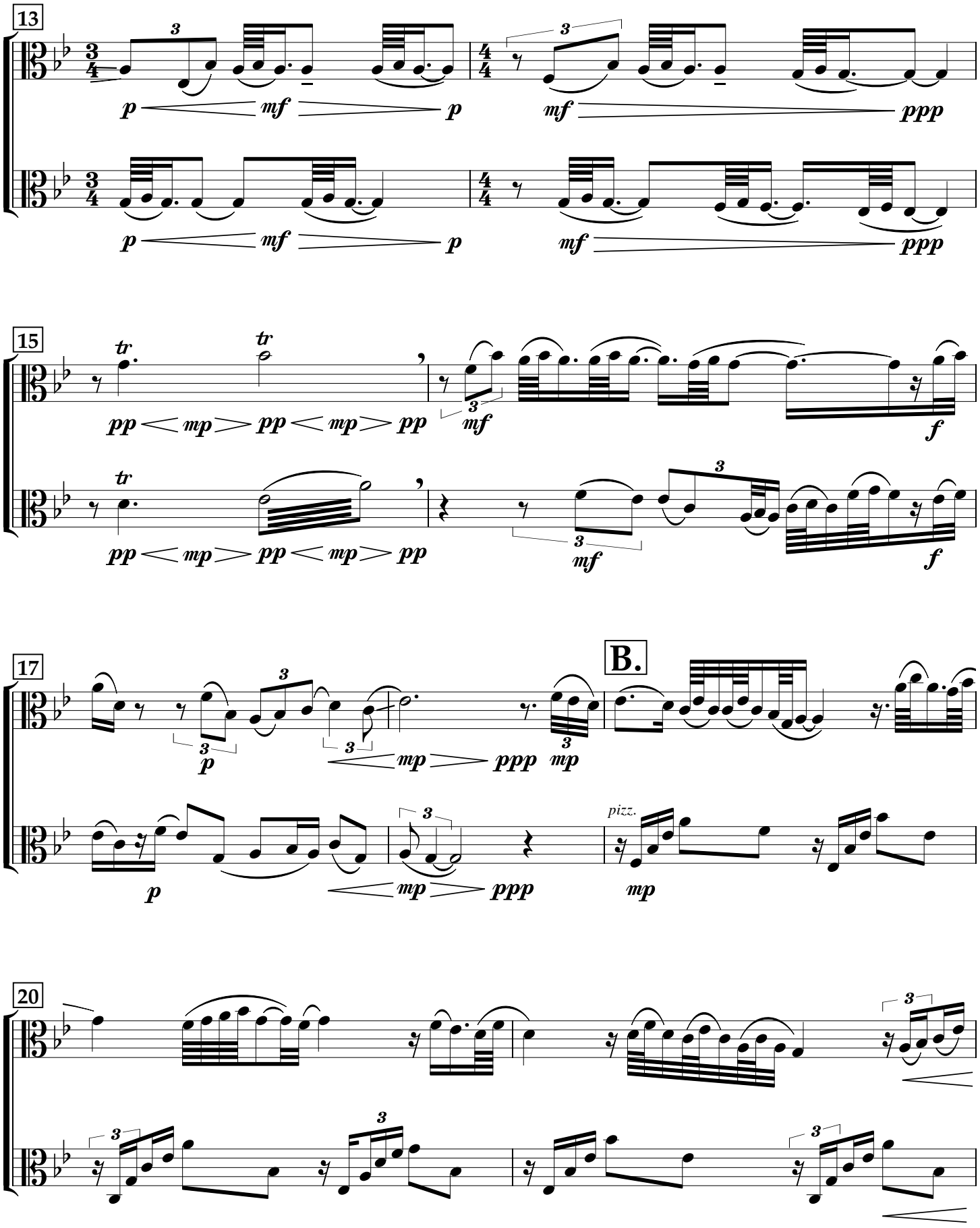


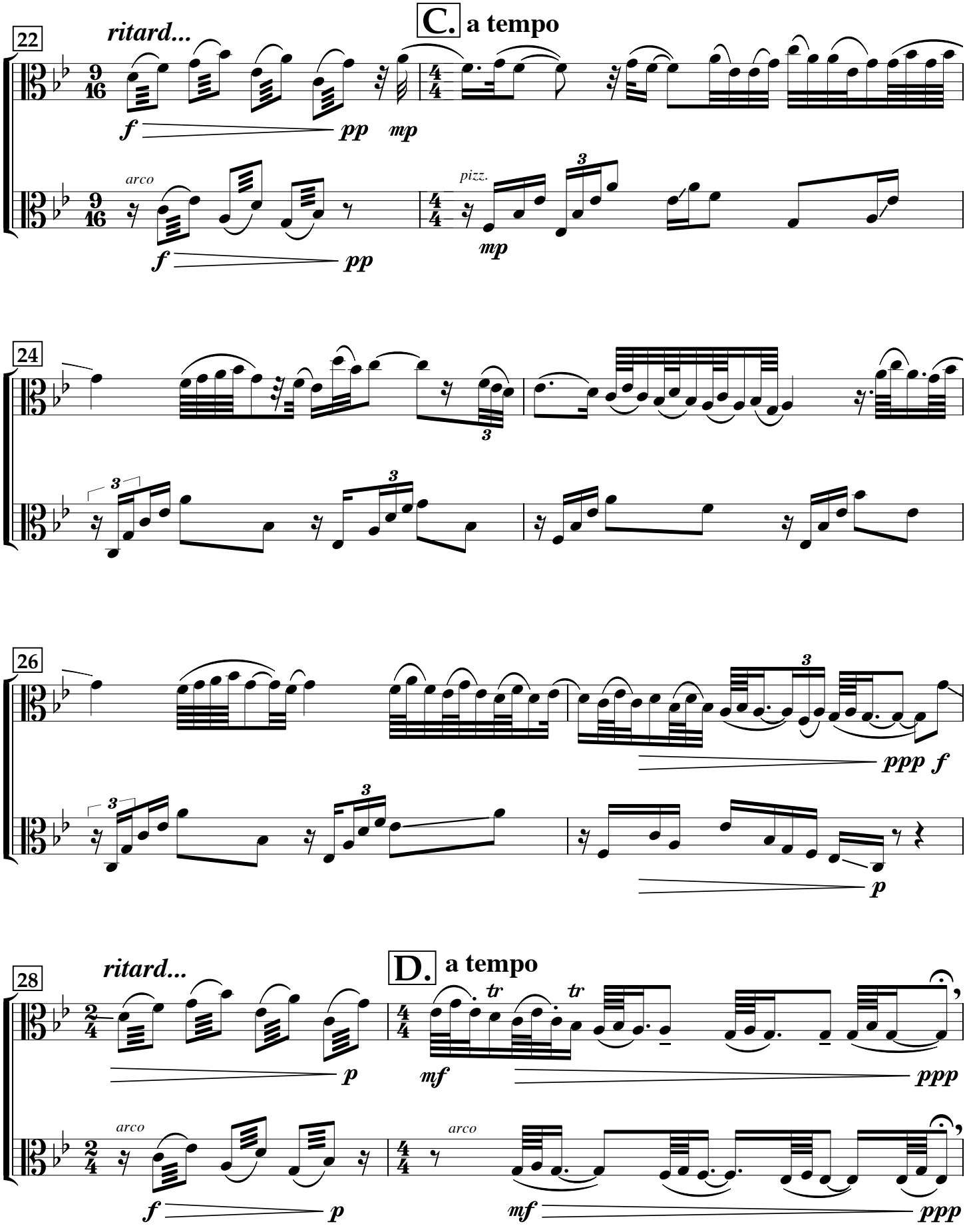
about 3:25

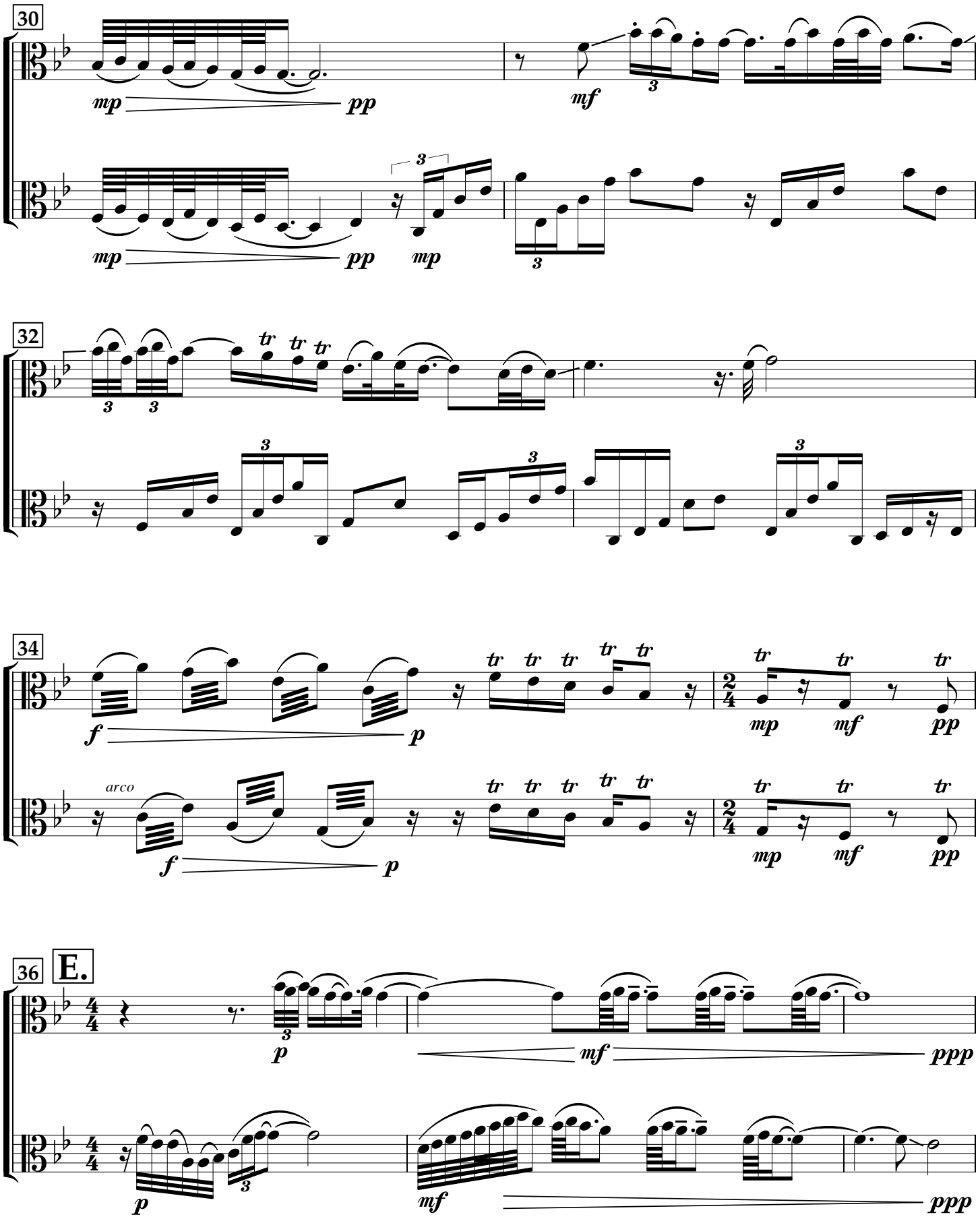
II. Reverie Navâ

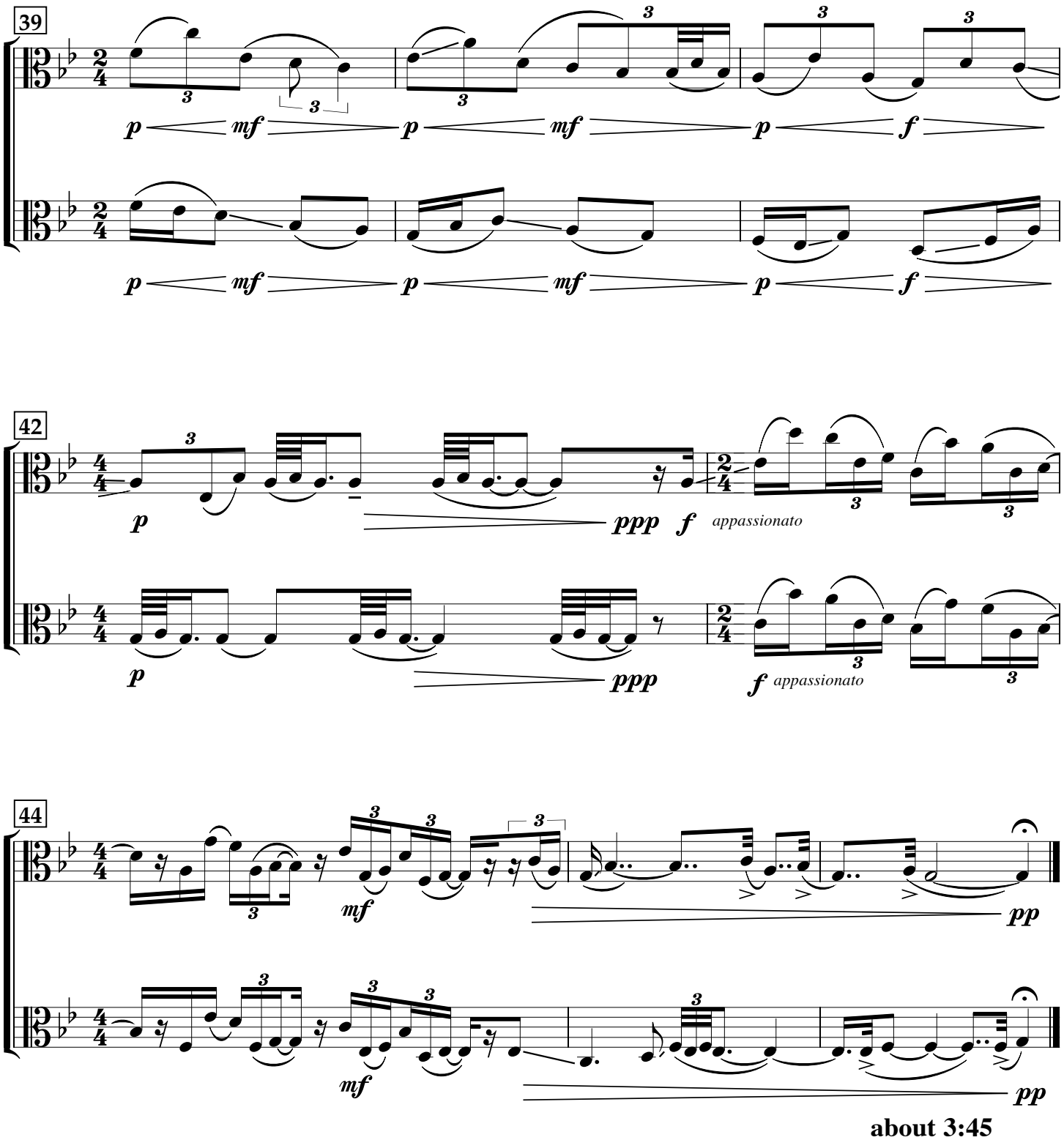
Molto rubato; about ♩=46




13
15
17
B.
20
pizz.

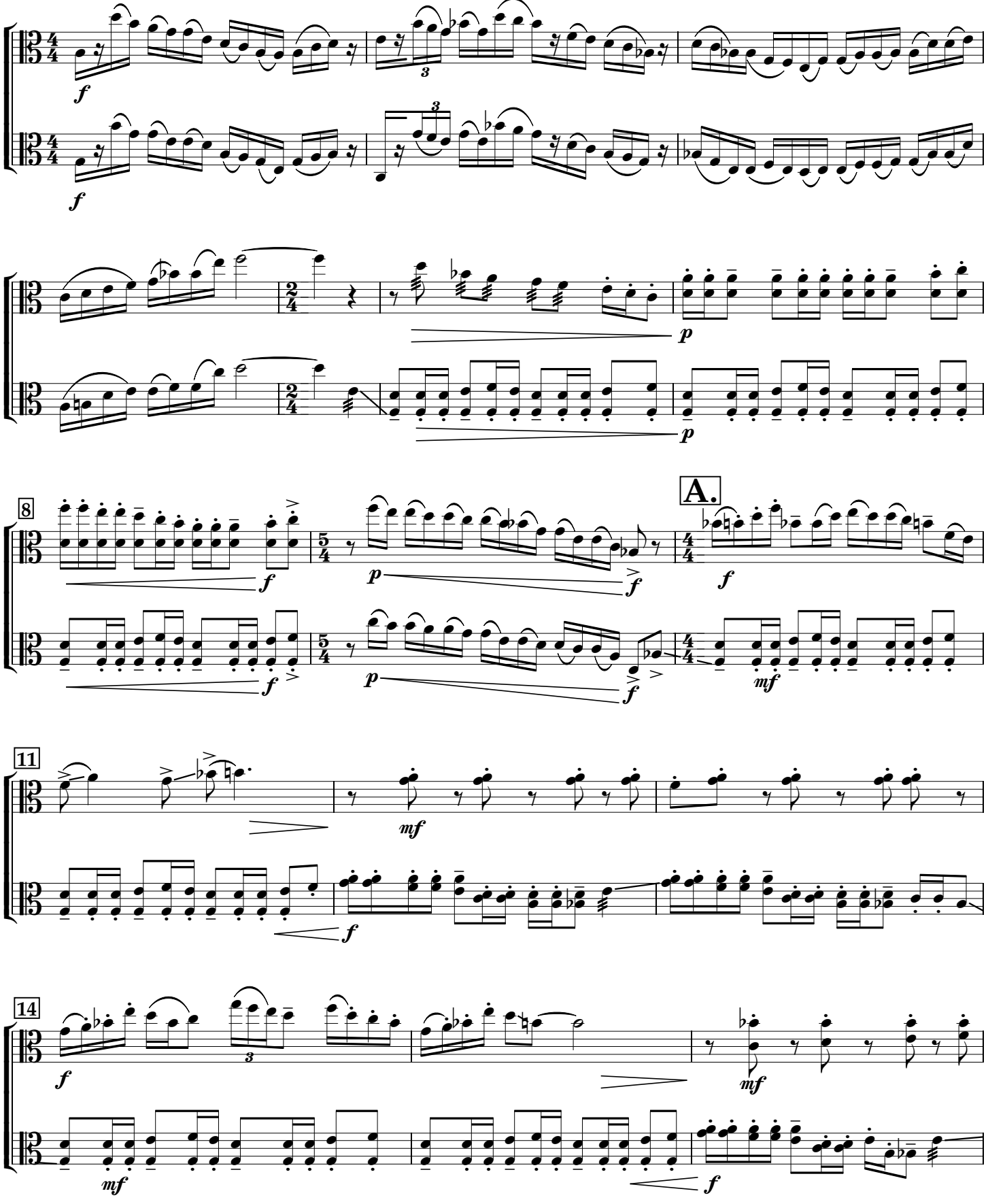

22
ritard...
C.
a tempo
arco
pizz.
24
26
ppp
28
ritard...
D.
a tempo
tr
arco


30
mp
pp
mf
mp
pp
mp
32
34
f
p
arco
f
p
mp
mf
pp
36
E.
p
mf
ppp
p
mf
ppp

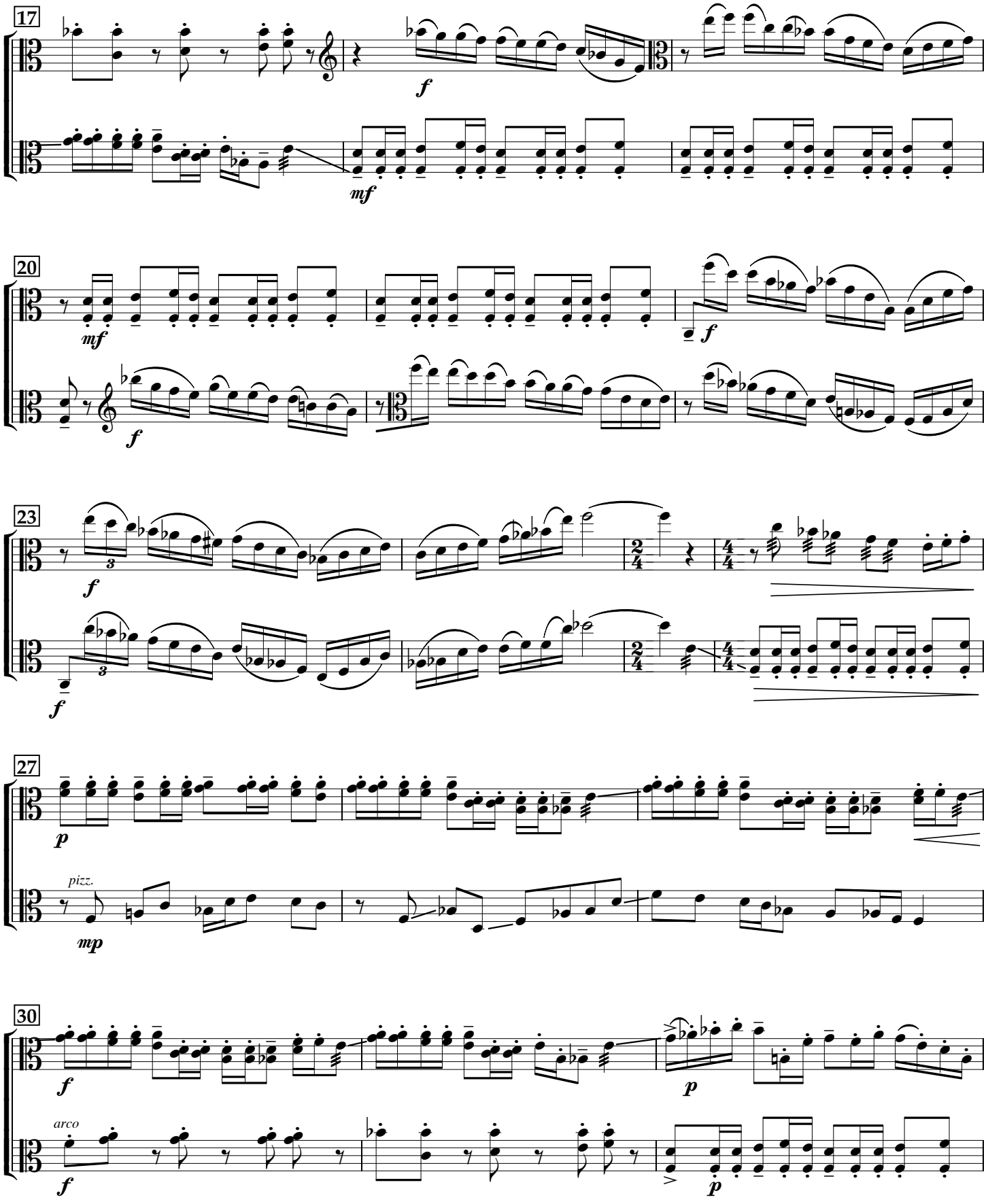

39
42
44
appassionato
appassionato
about 3:45

III. Cajun Mahur

Con spirito ♩=100



III. Mahur, p.2



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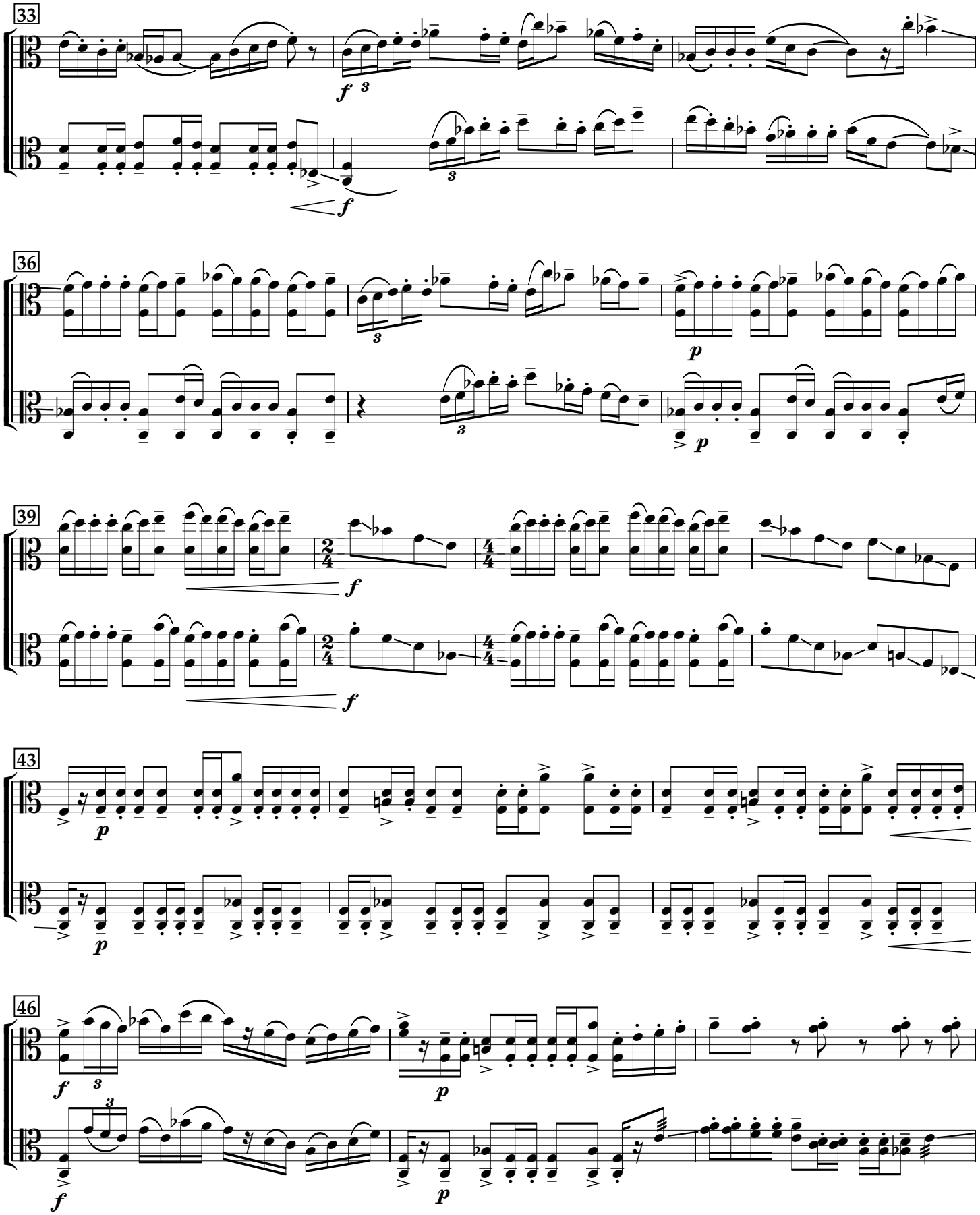

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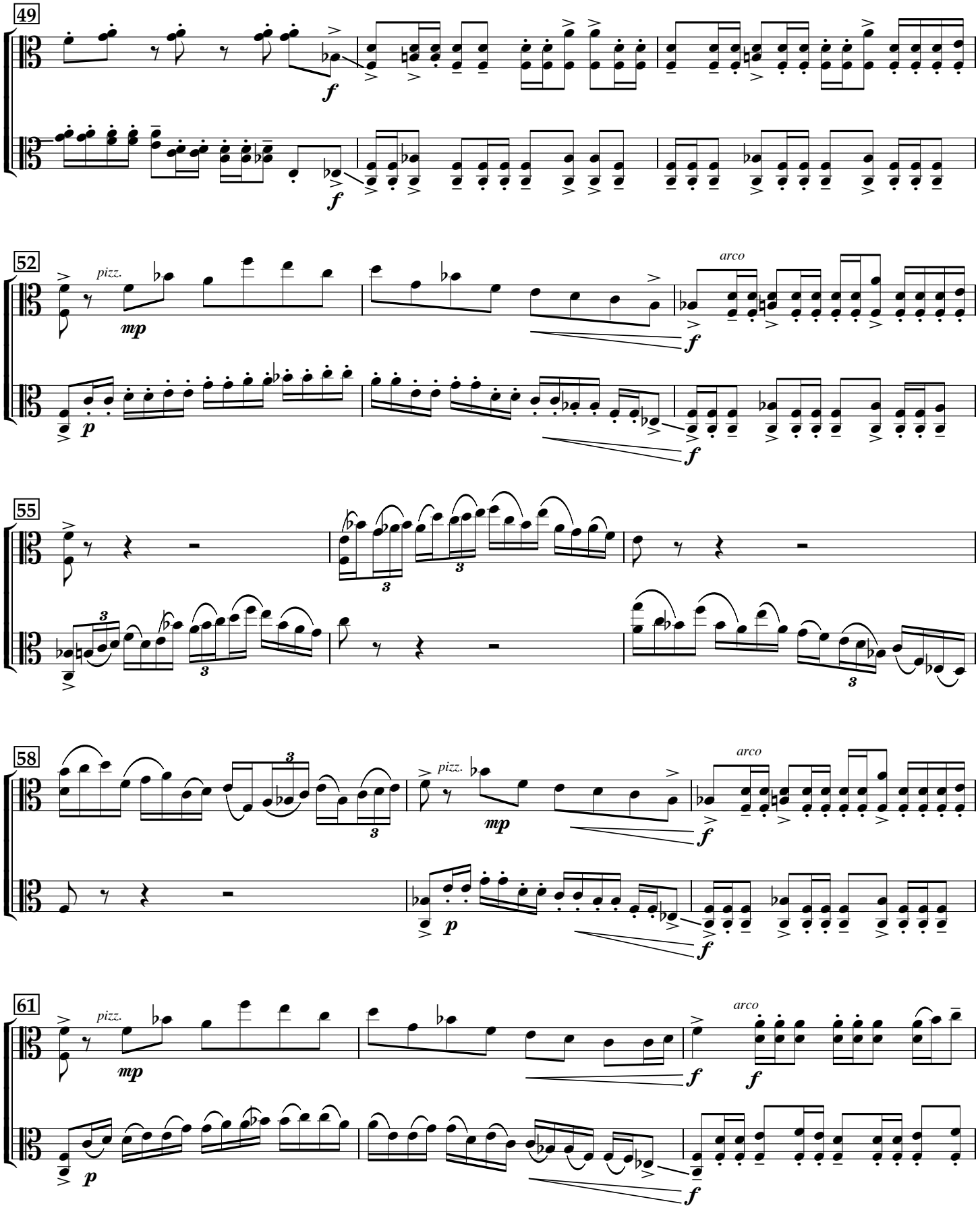
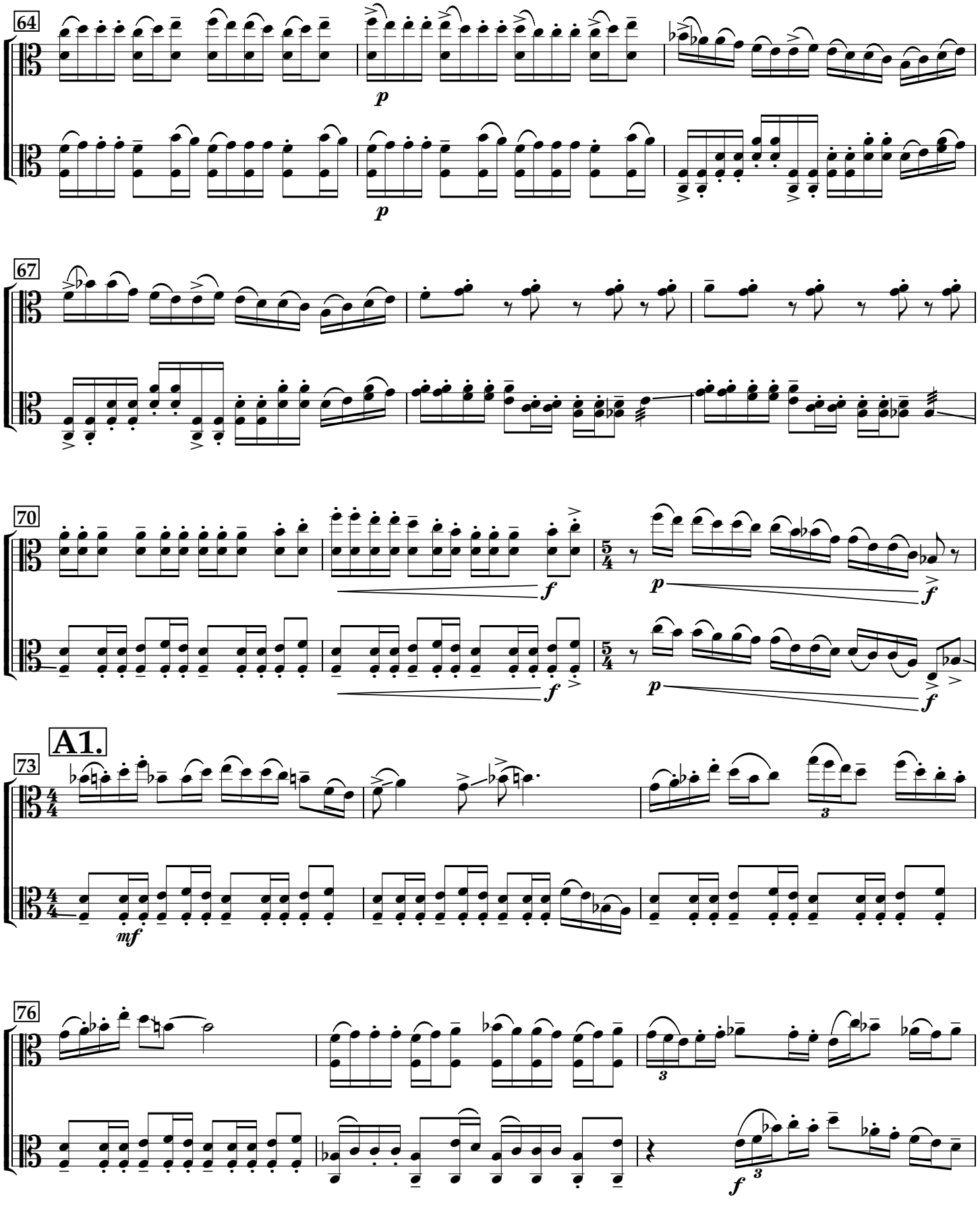
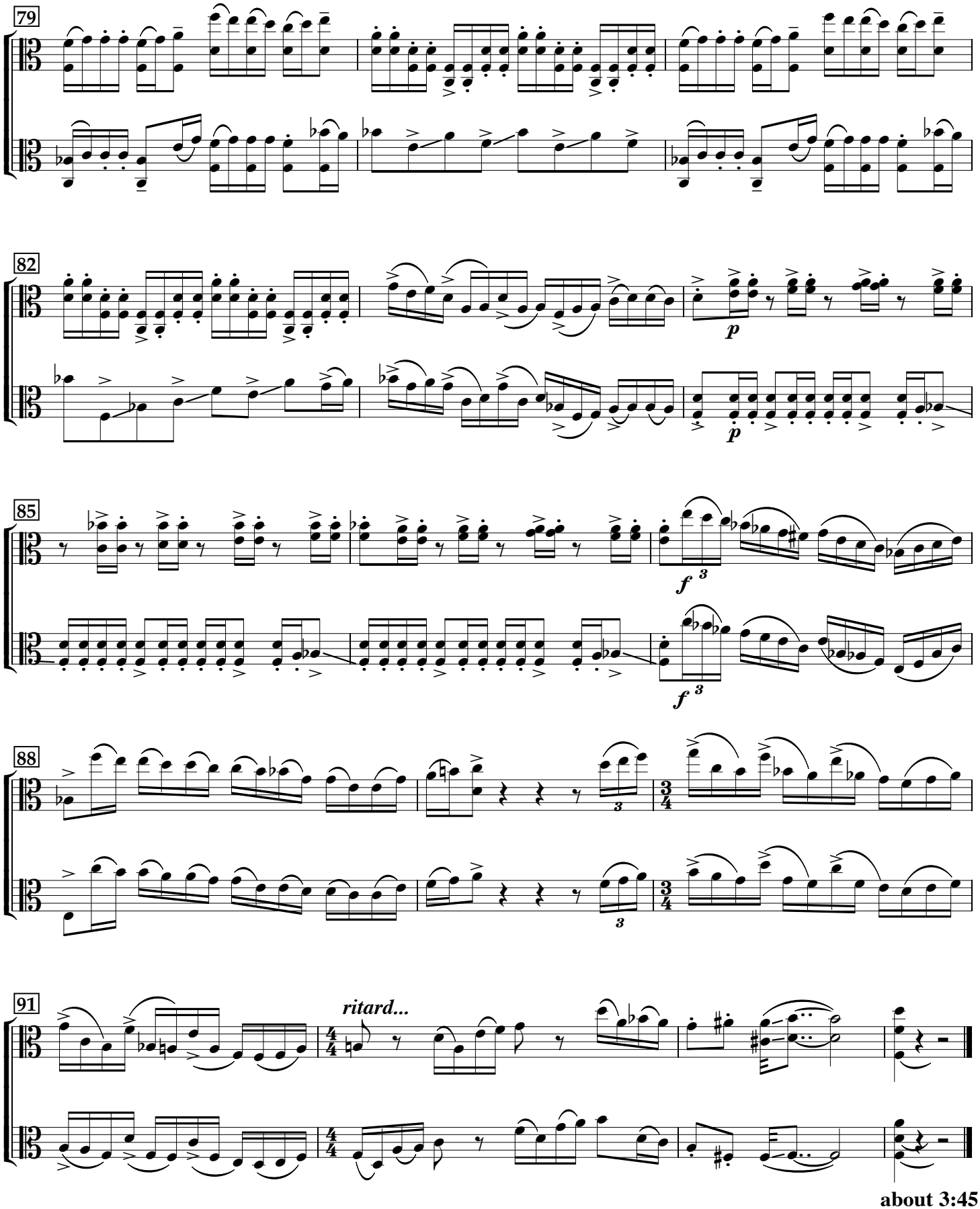


III. Mahur, p.5



III. Mahur, p.6



Viola I

I. Lamentation Homâyûn

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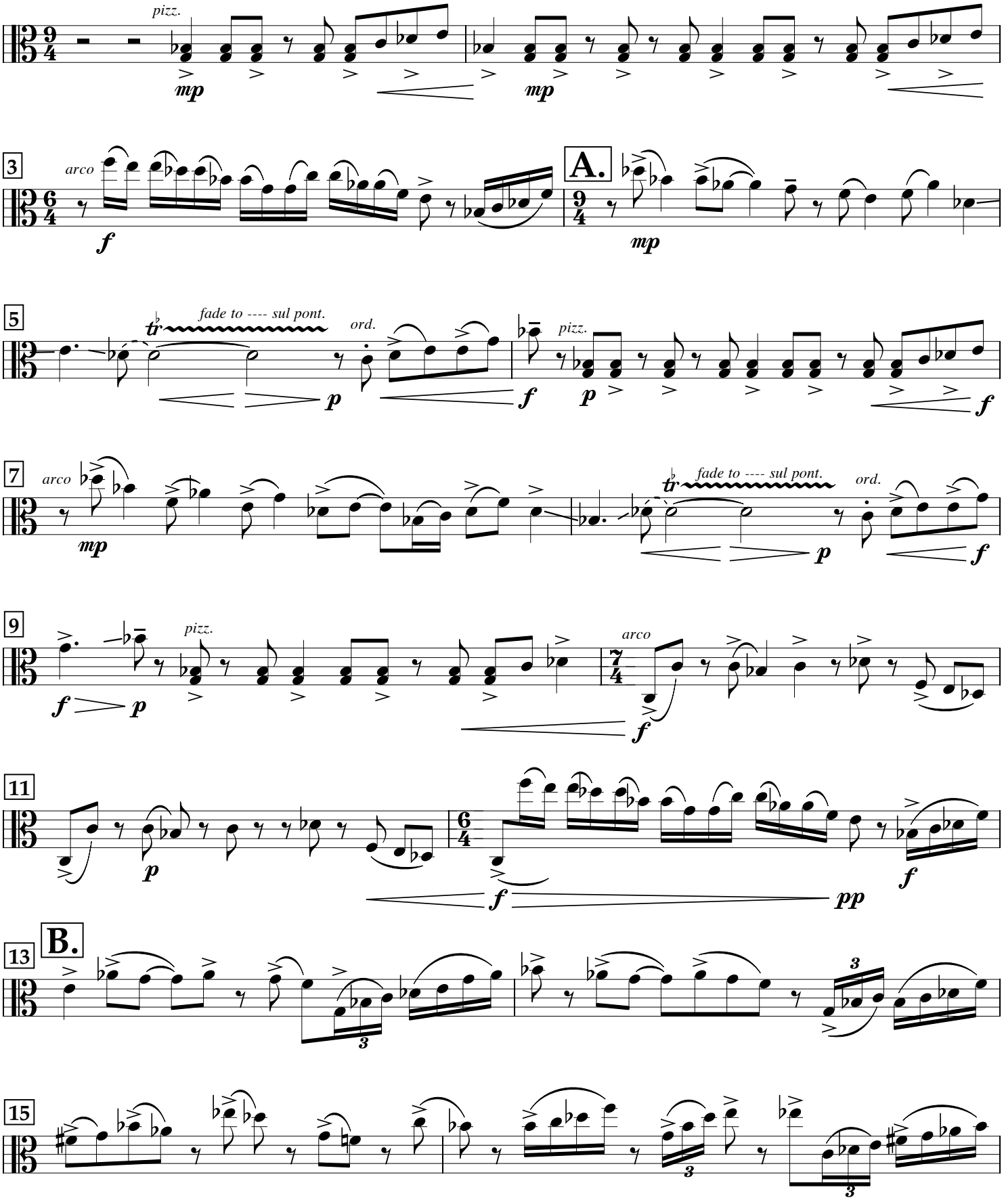
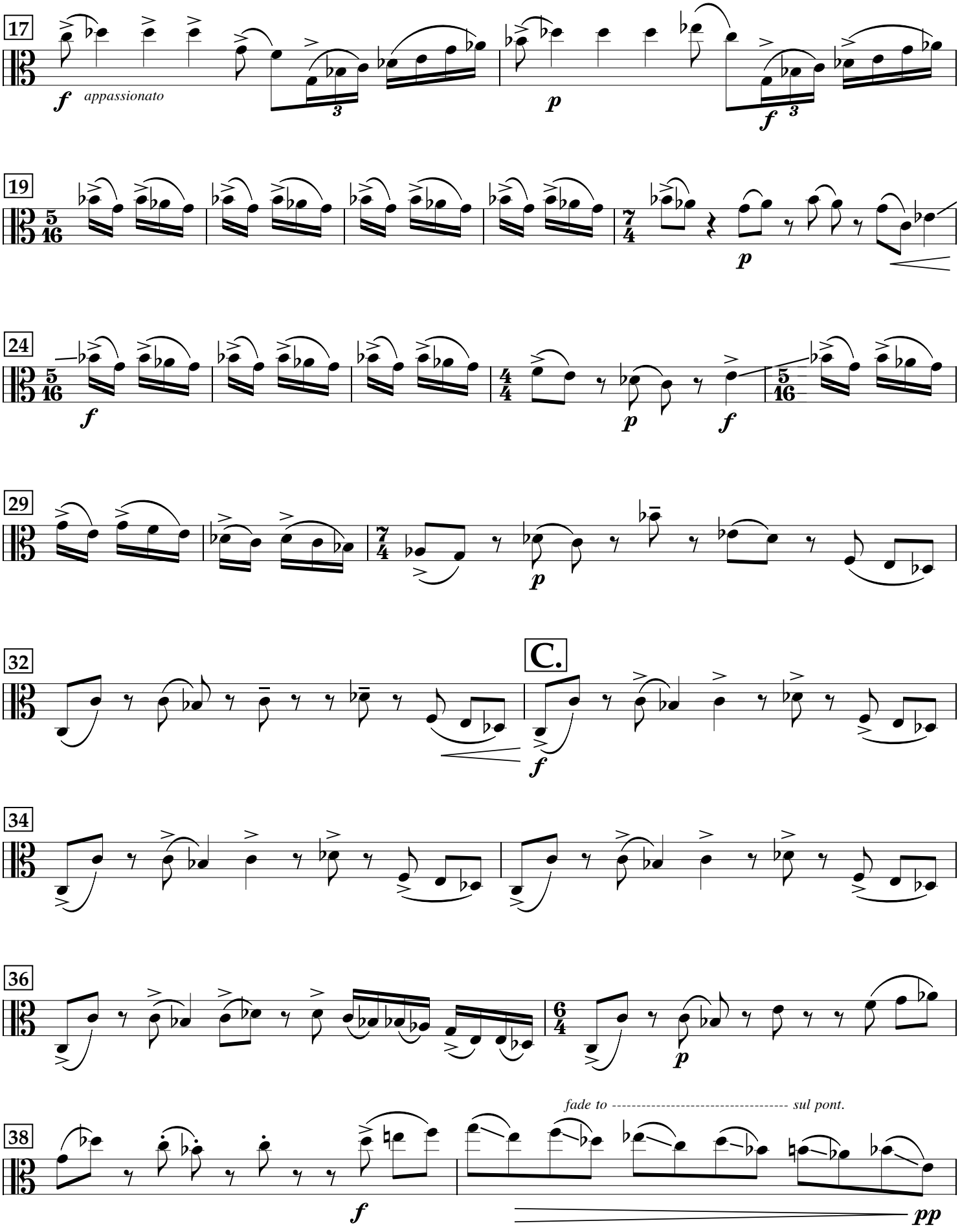
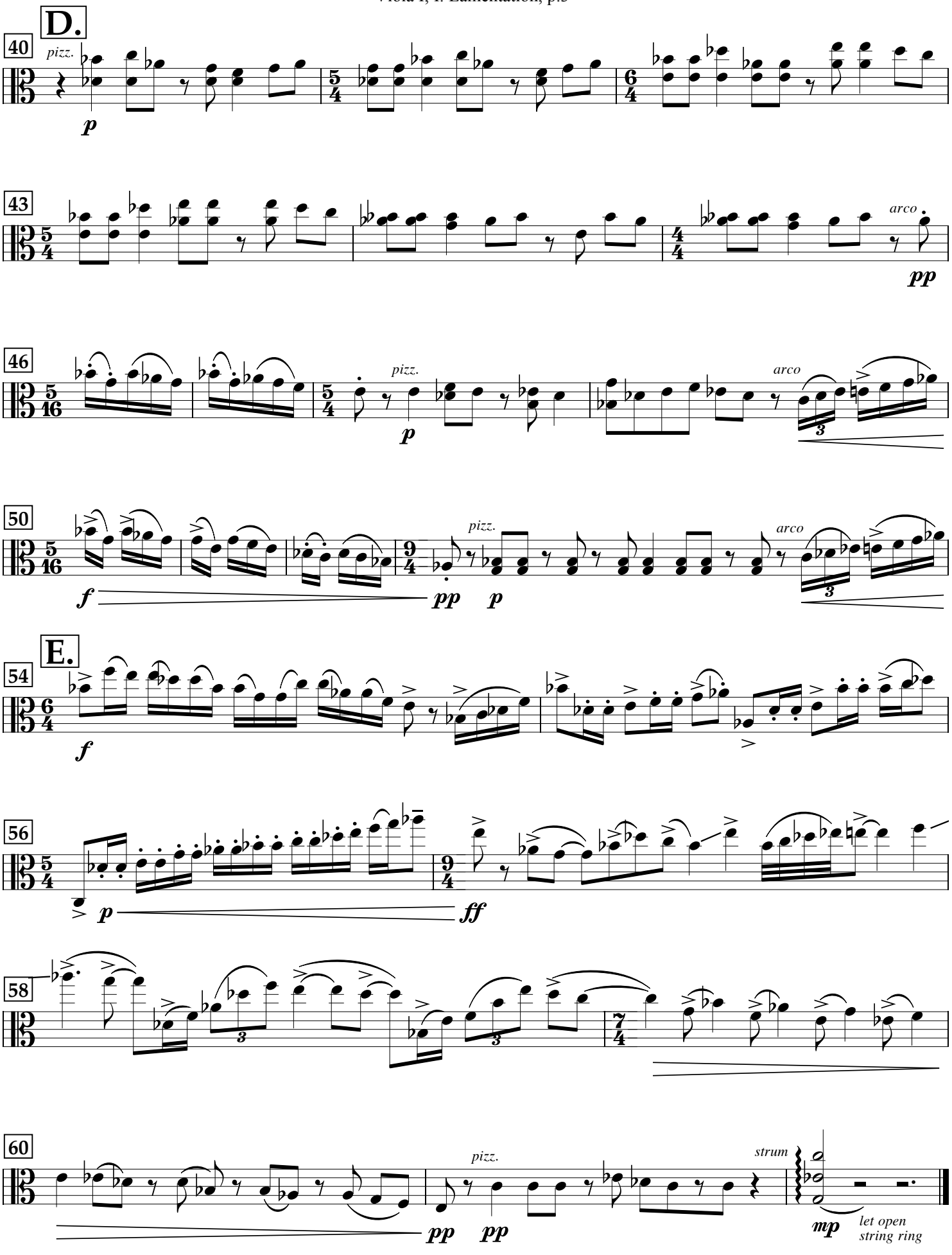
Jon Jeffrey Grier

Misterioso ♩=100



Viola I, I. Lamentation, p.2

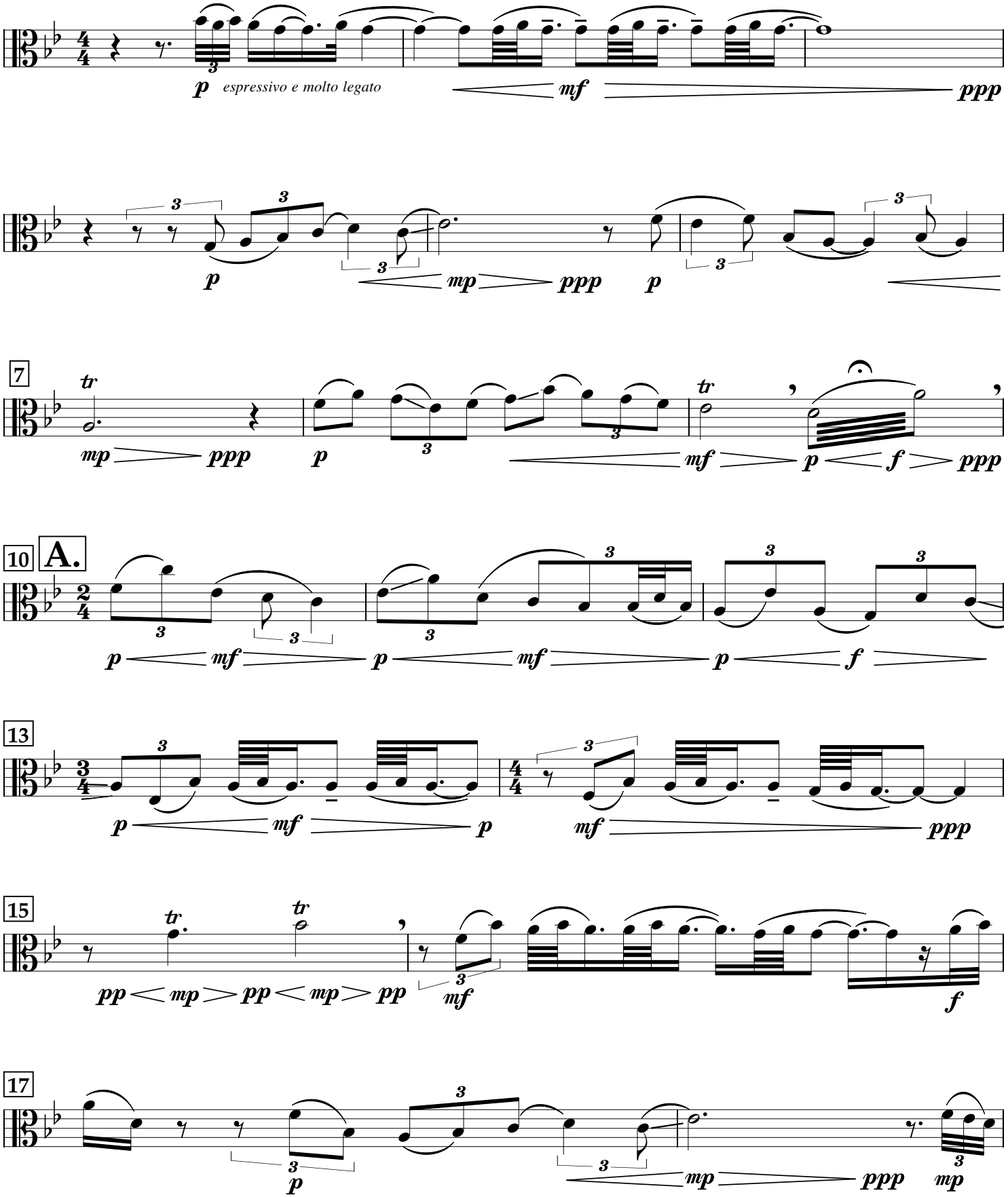


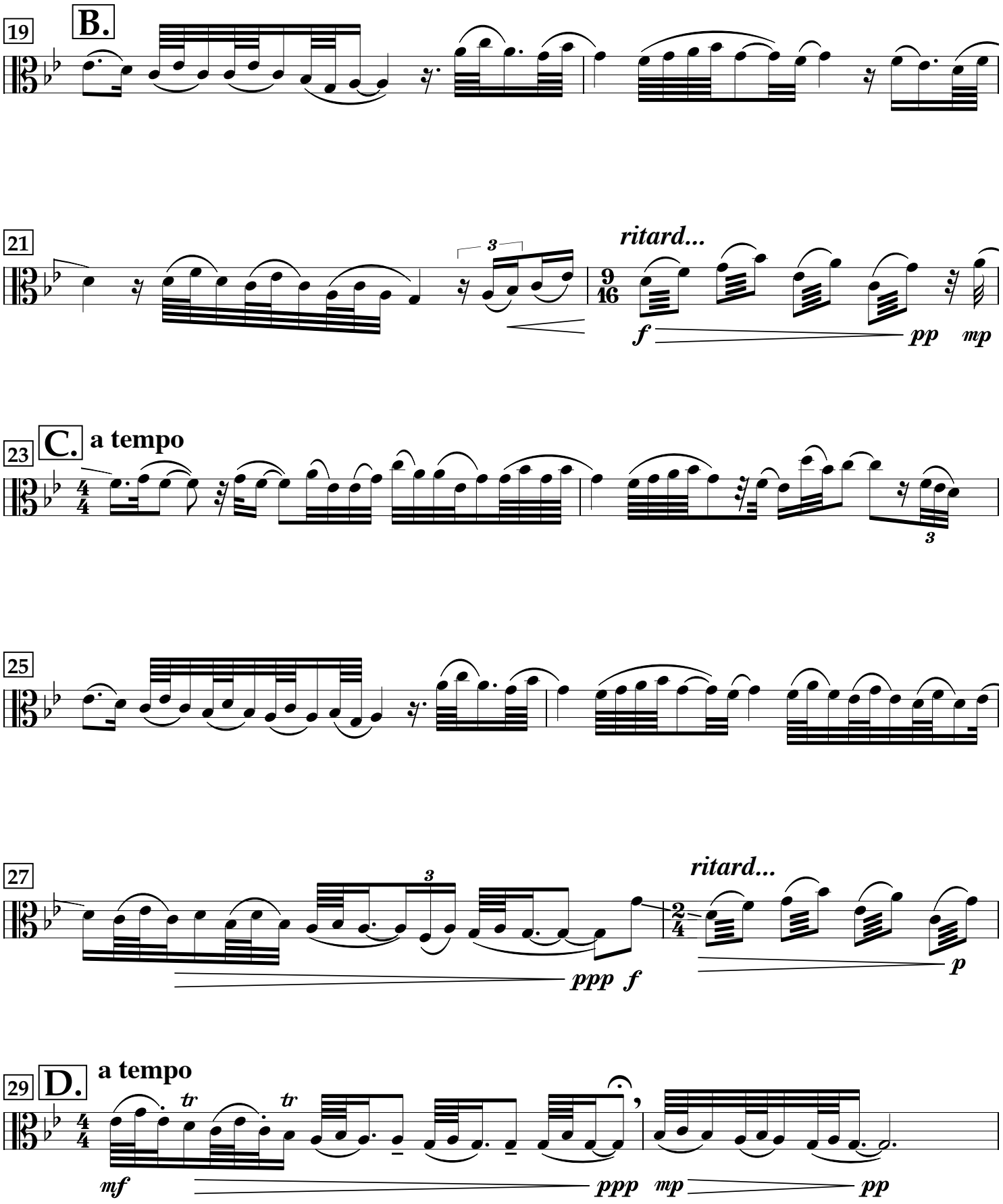

D.
40
pizz.
p
43
arco
pp
46
pizz.
p
arco
3
50
f
pp
pizz.
p
arco
3
E.
54
f
56
p
ff
58
3
3
60
pp
pizz.
pp
strum
mp
let open
string ring

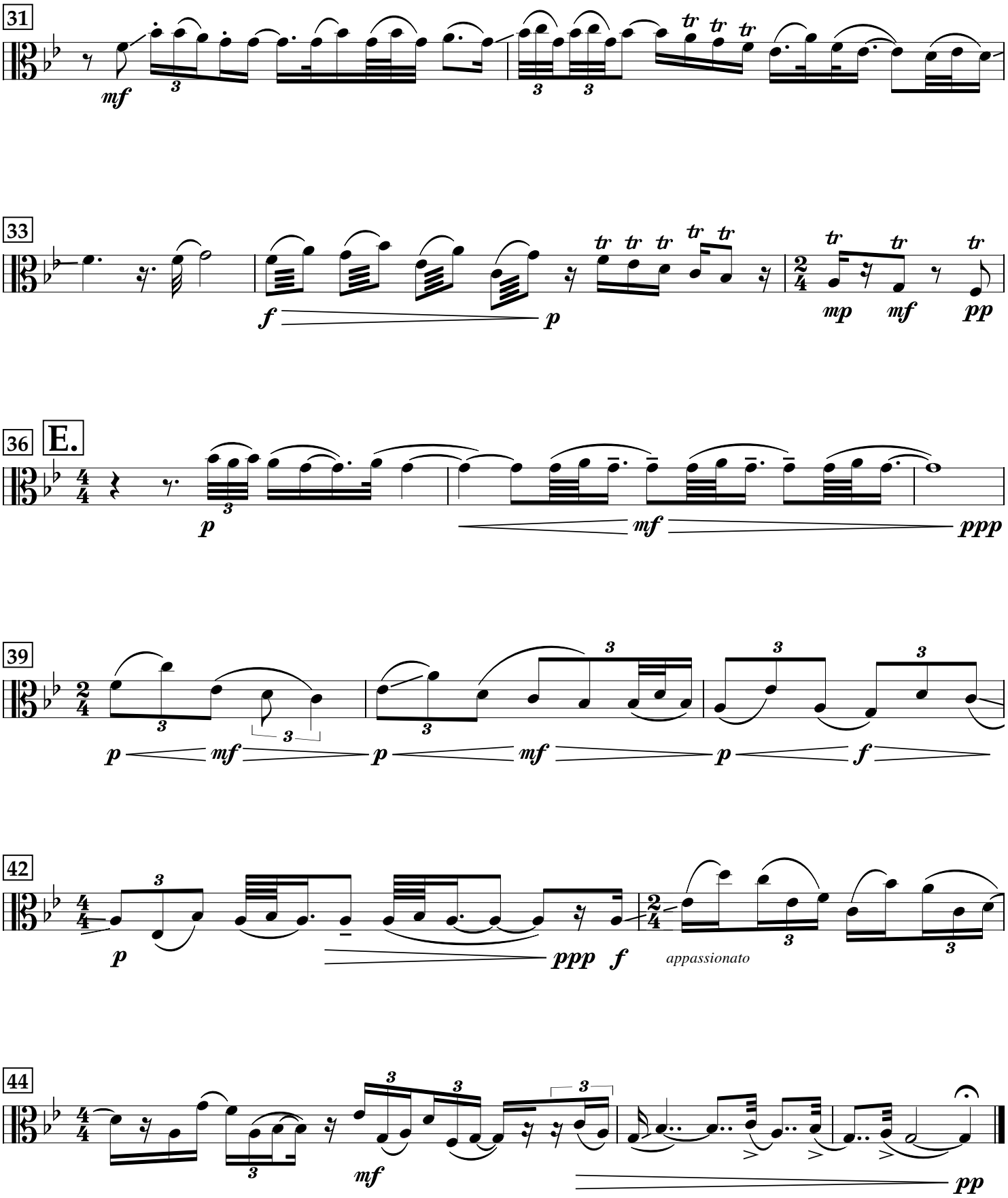
Viola I

II. Reverie Navâ

Molto rubato; about ♩=46




19
B.
21
ritard...
f
pp
mp
23
C.
a tempo
25
27
ritard...
ppp
f
p
29
D.
a tempo
tr
tr
mf
ppp
mp
pp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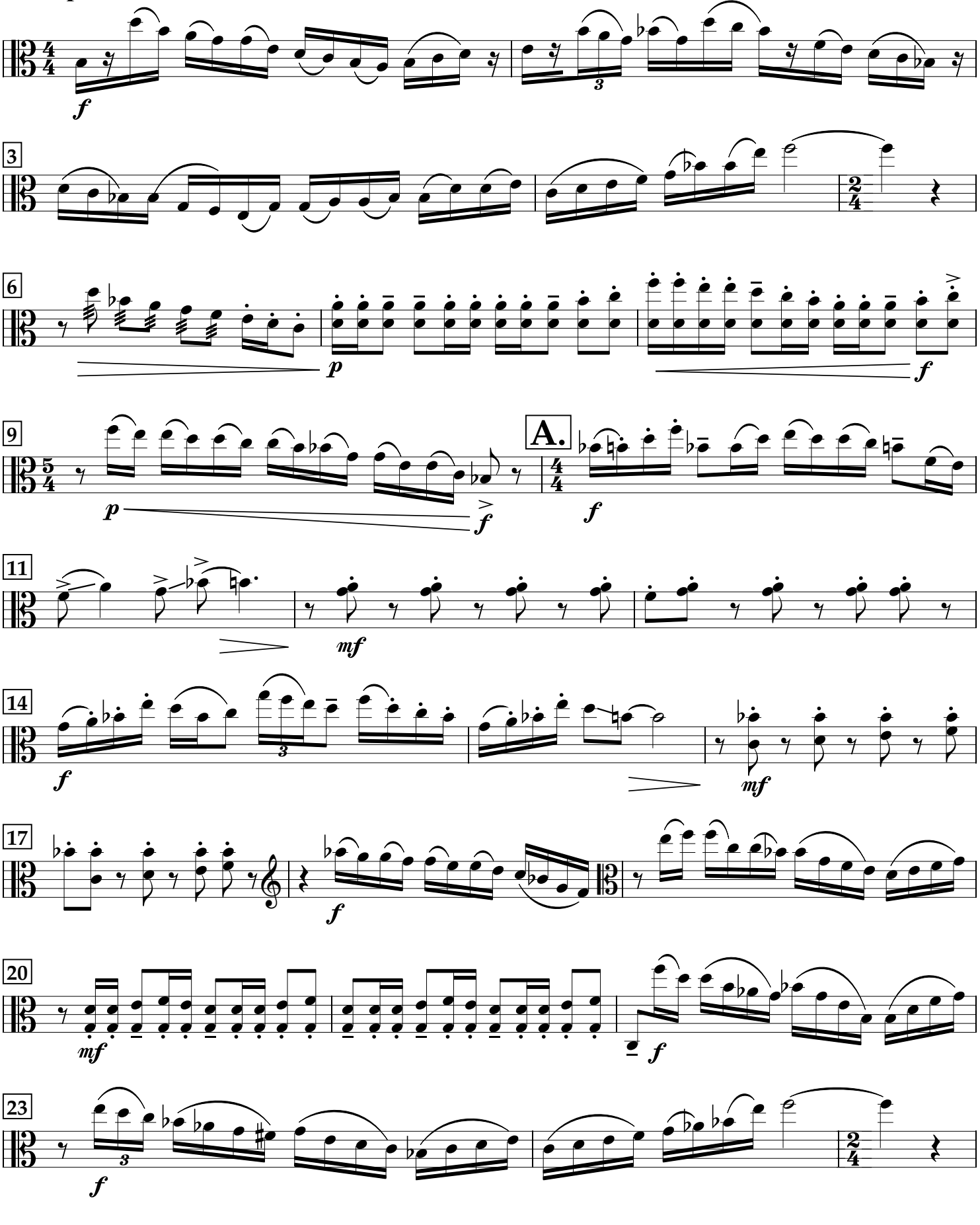
mf
33
f
p
mp
mf
pp
36
E.
p
mf
ppp
39
p
mf
p
mf
p
f
42
p
ppp
f
appassionato
44
mf
pp

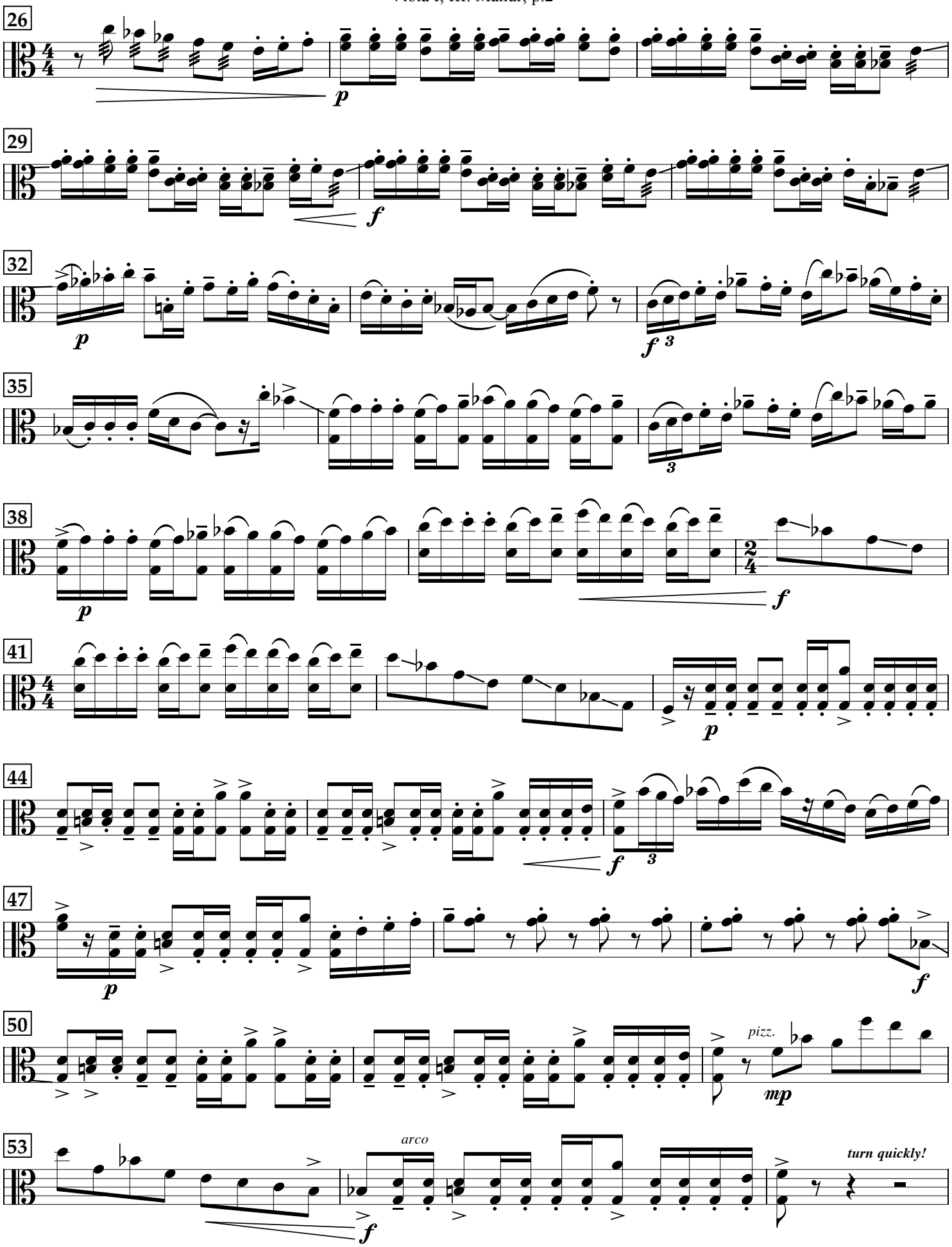
Viola I

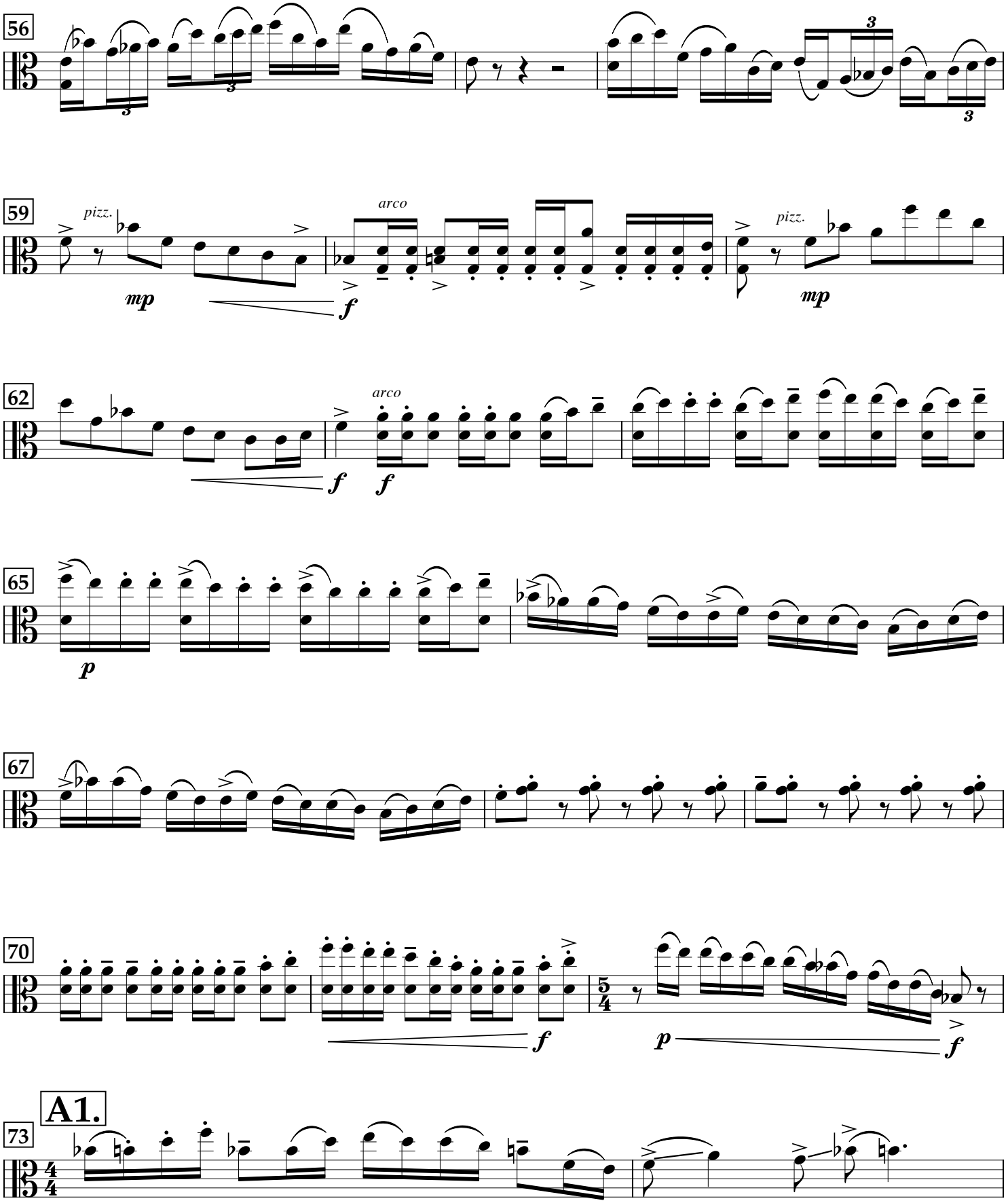
III. Cajun Mahur

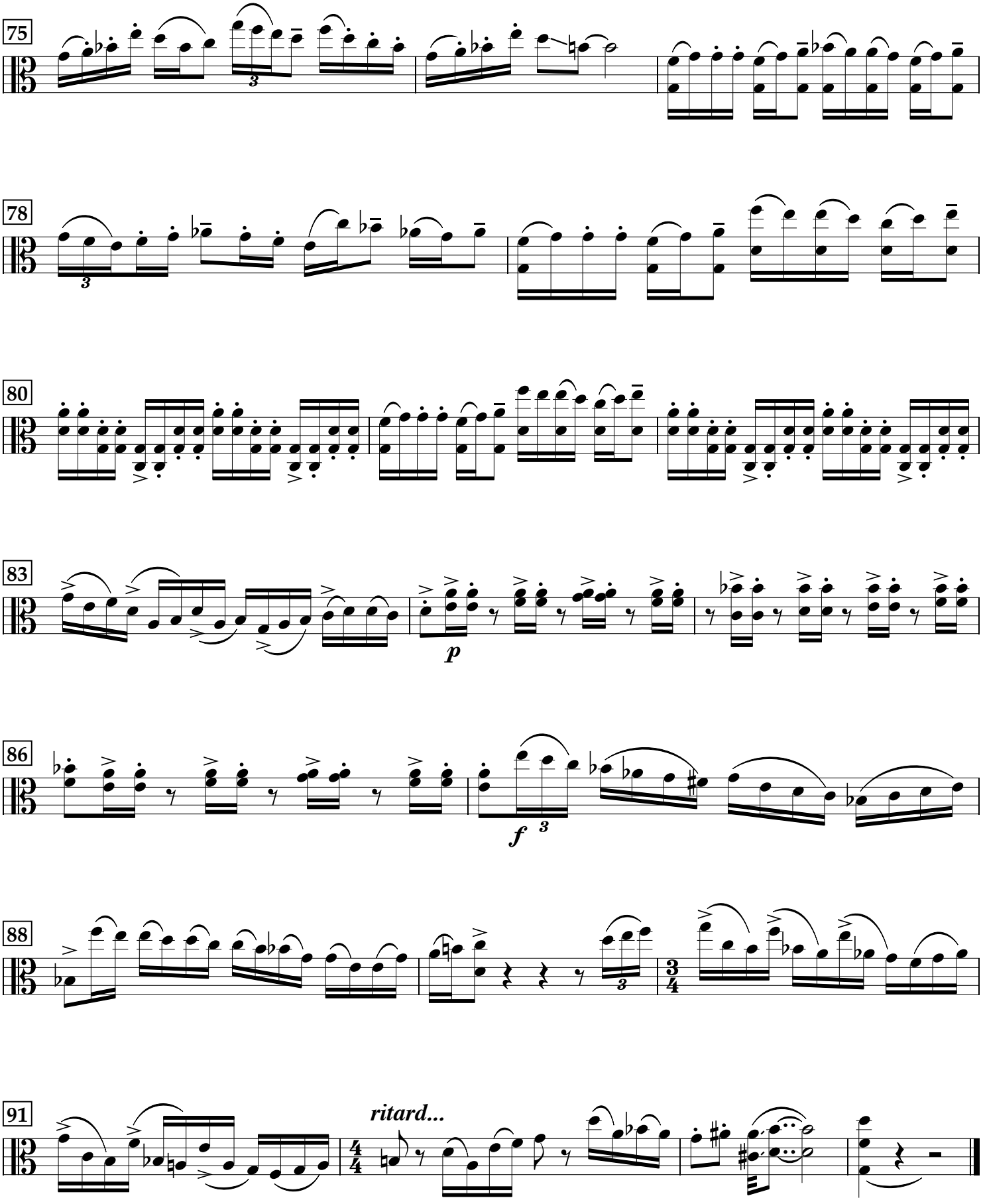
Con spirito ♩=100



Viola I, III. Mahur, p.2




56
59
pizz.
arco
pizz.
mp
f
62
arco
f
f
65
p
67
70
f
p
f
73
A1.
4/4
5/4


75
78
80
83
p
86
f
88
91
ritard...

Viola II

I. Lamentation Homâyûn

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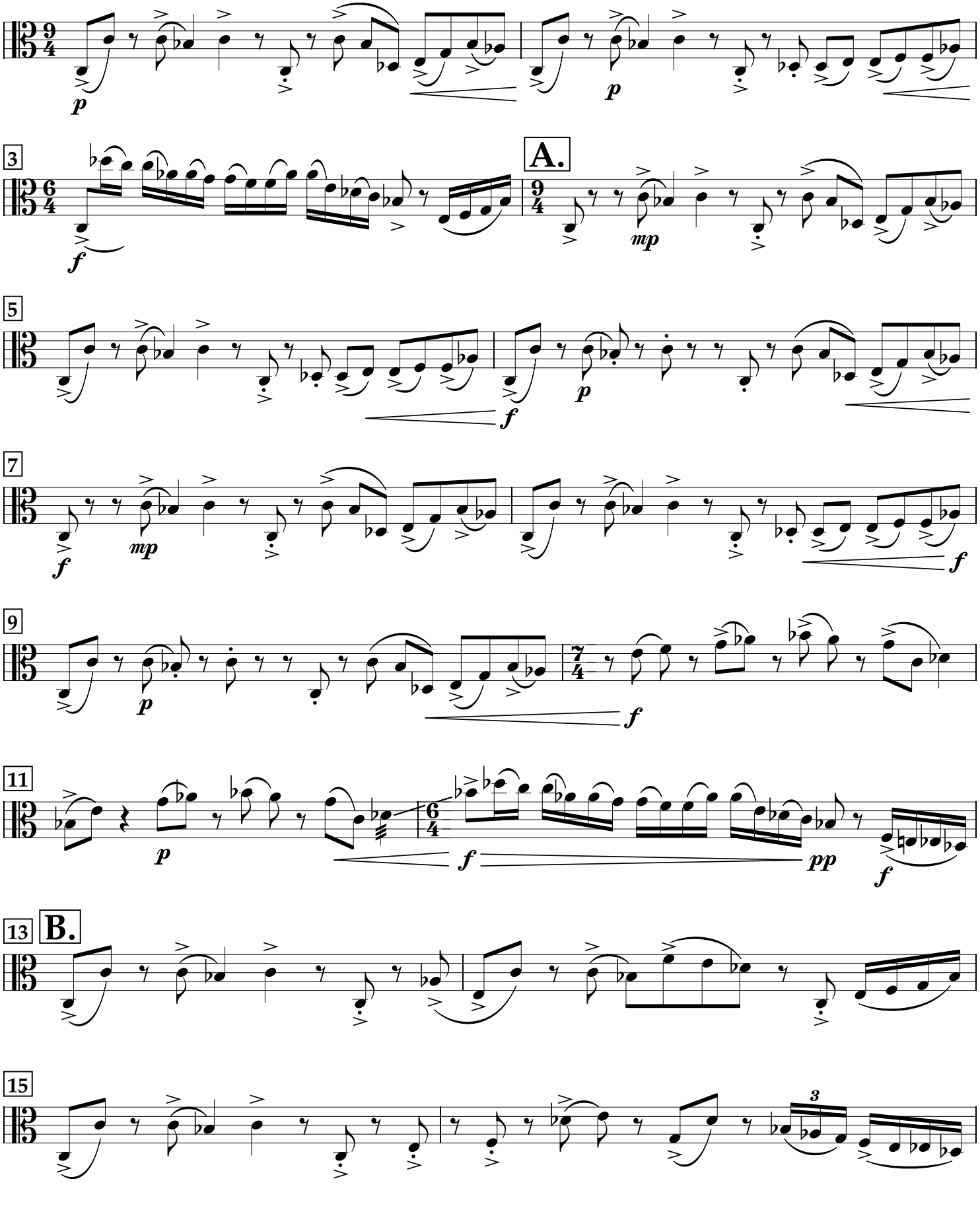
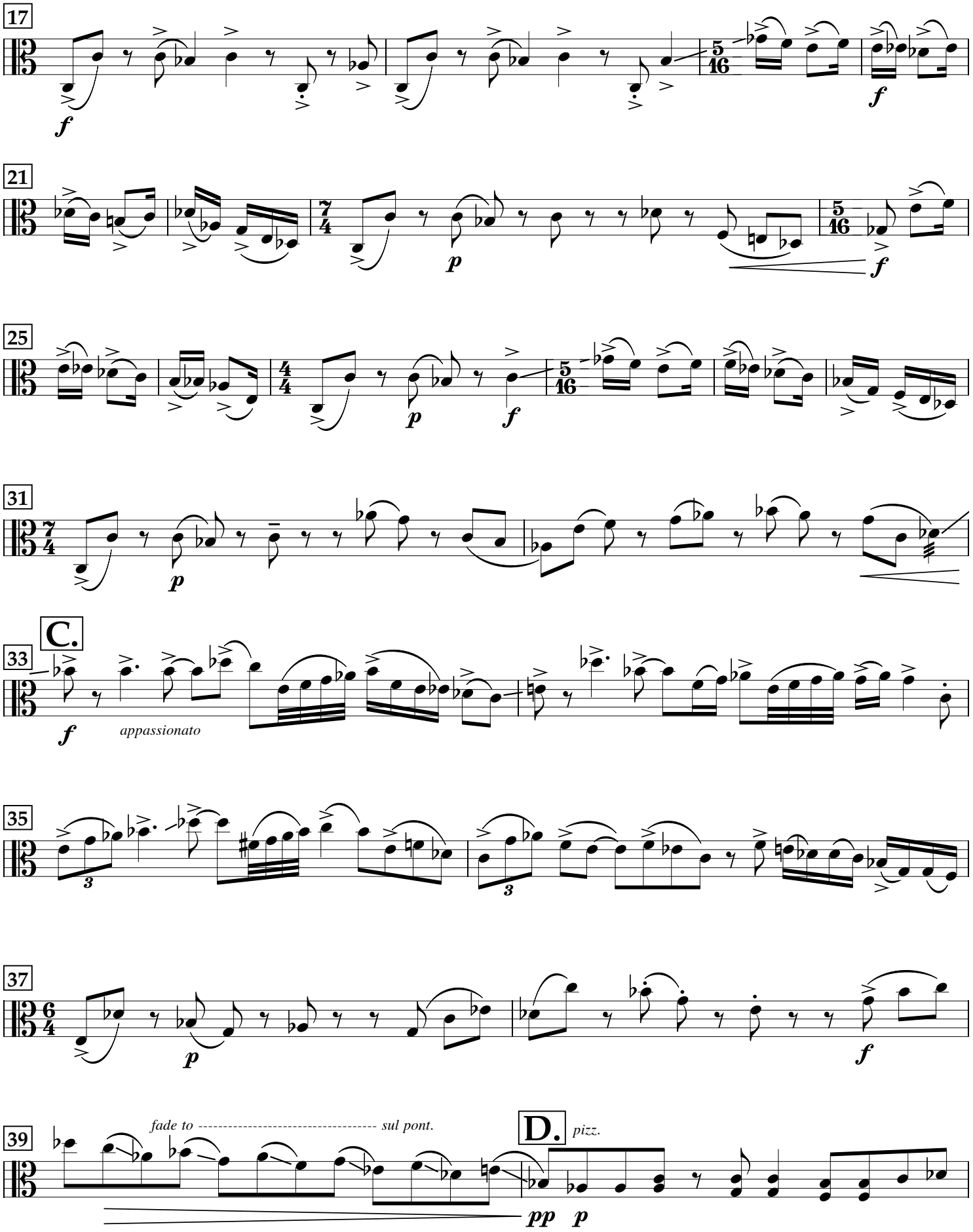
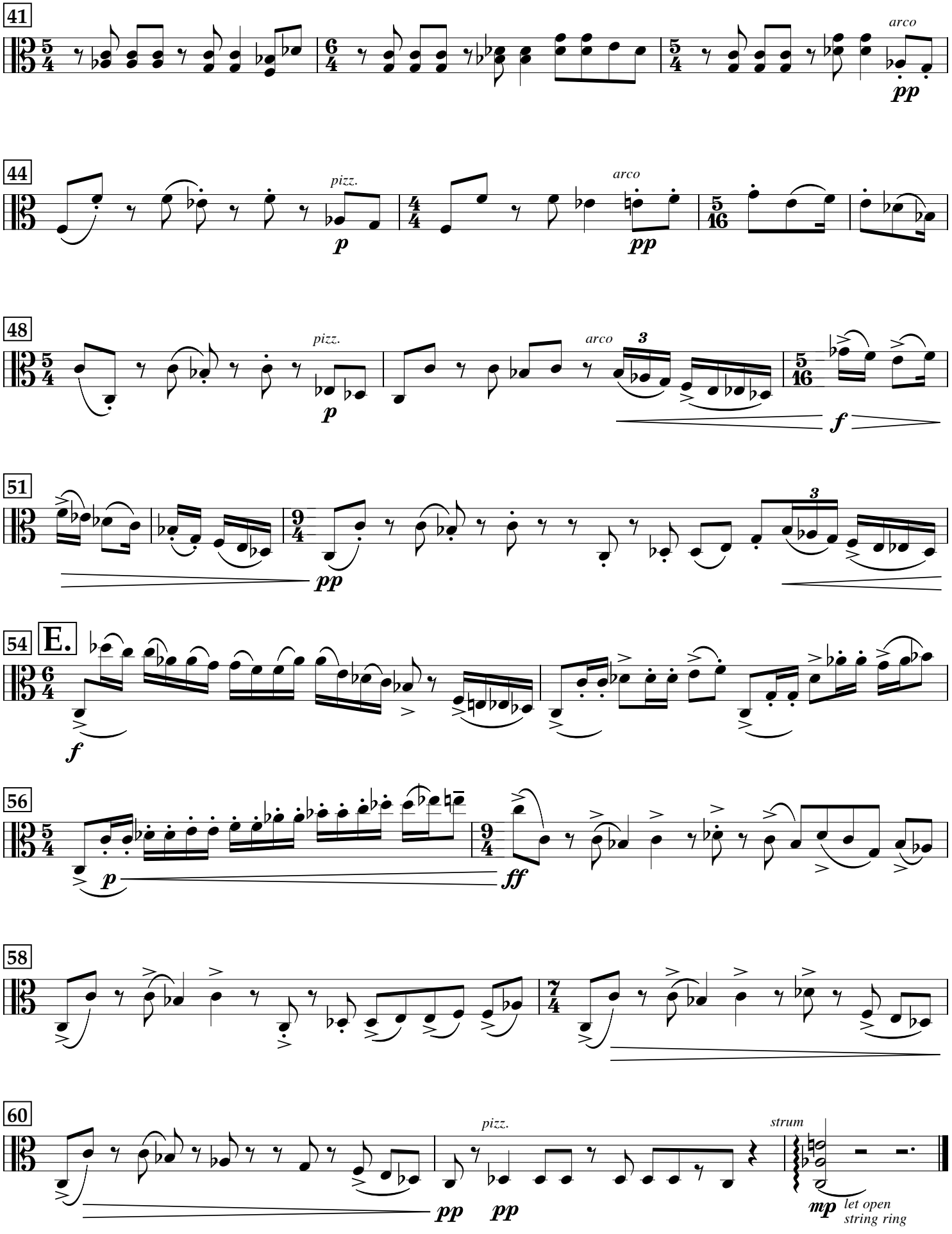
Misterioso ♩=100

Jon Jeffrey Grier



Viola II, I. Lamentation, p.2

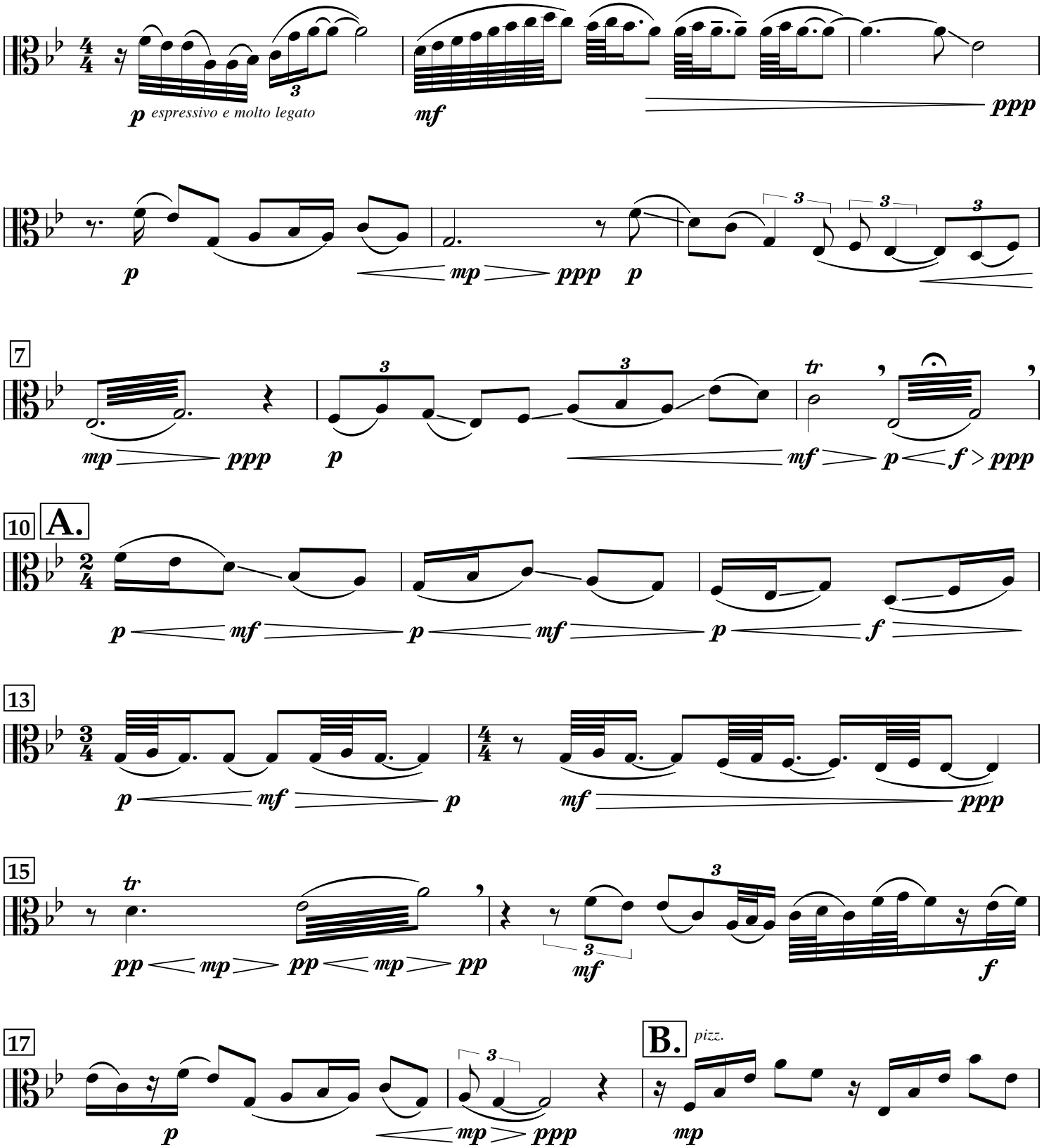


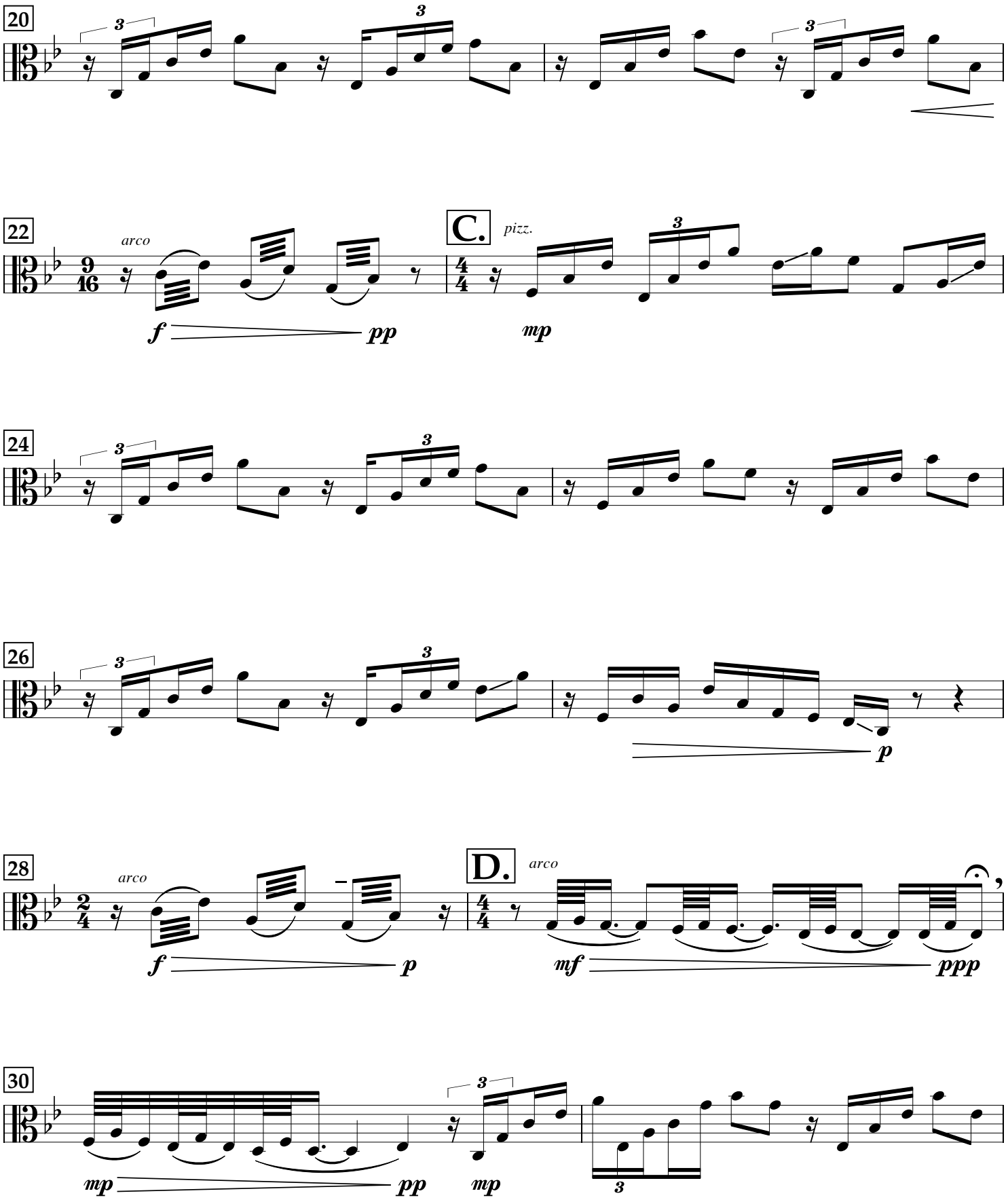

41
arco
pp
44
pizz.
p
arco
pp
48
pizz.
p
arco
3
f
51
pp
3
54
E.
f
56
p
ff
58
60
pizz.
pp
pp
strum
mp
let open
string ring

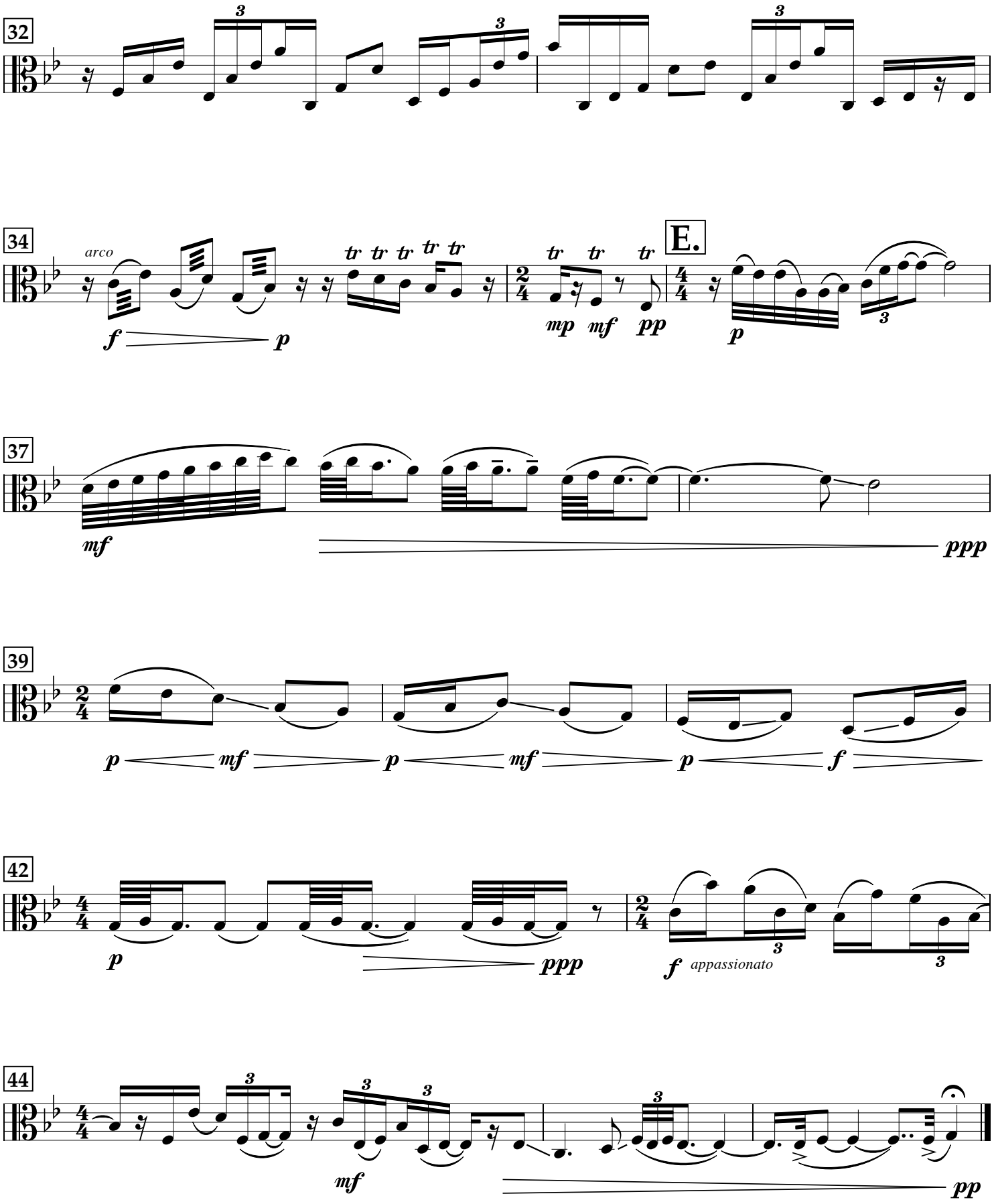
Viola II

II. Reverie Navâ

Molto rubato; about ♩=46



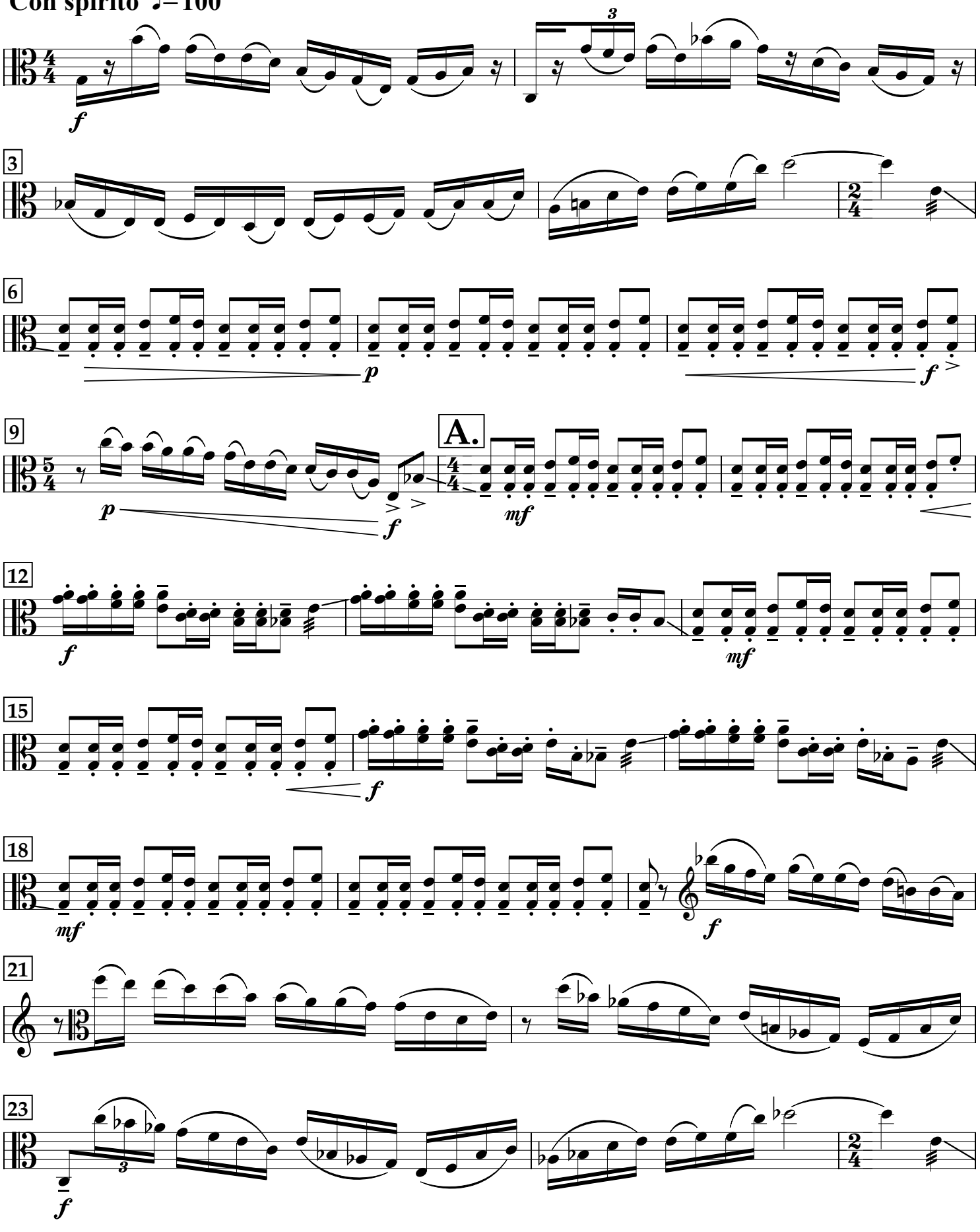

20
22
arco
C.
pizz.
24
26
28
arco
D.
arco
30


32
34
arco
f
p
mp
mf
pp
E.
p
37
mf
ppp
39
p
mf
p
mf
p
f
42
p
ppp
f
appassionato
44
mf
pp

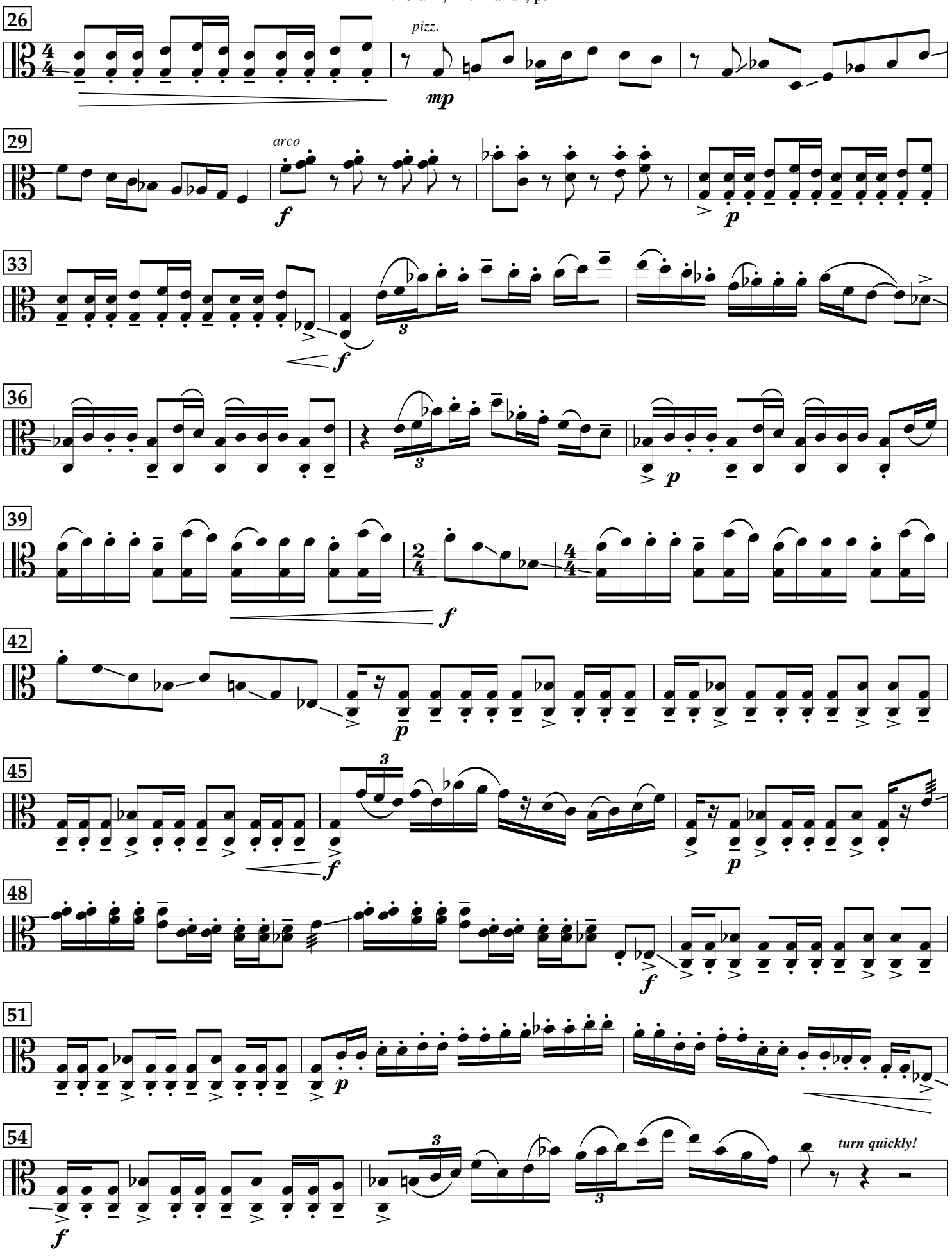
Viola II

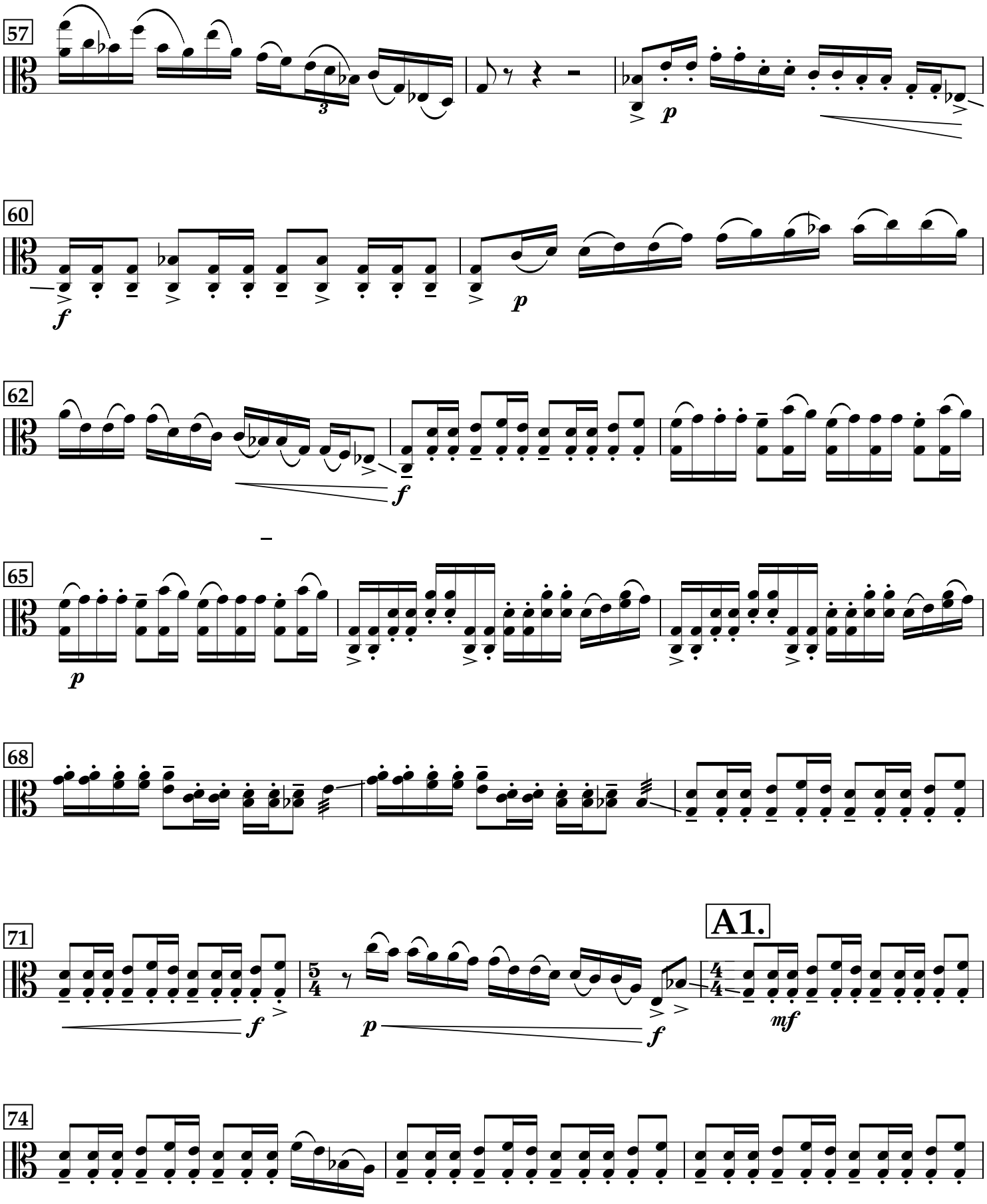
III. Cajun Mahur

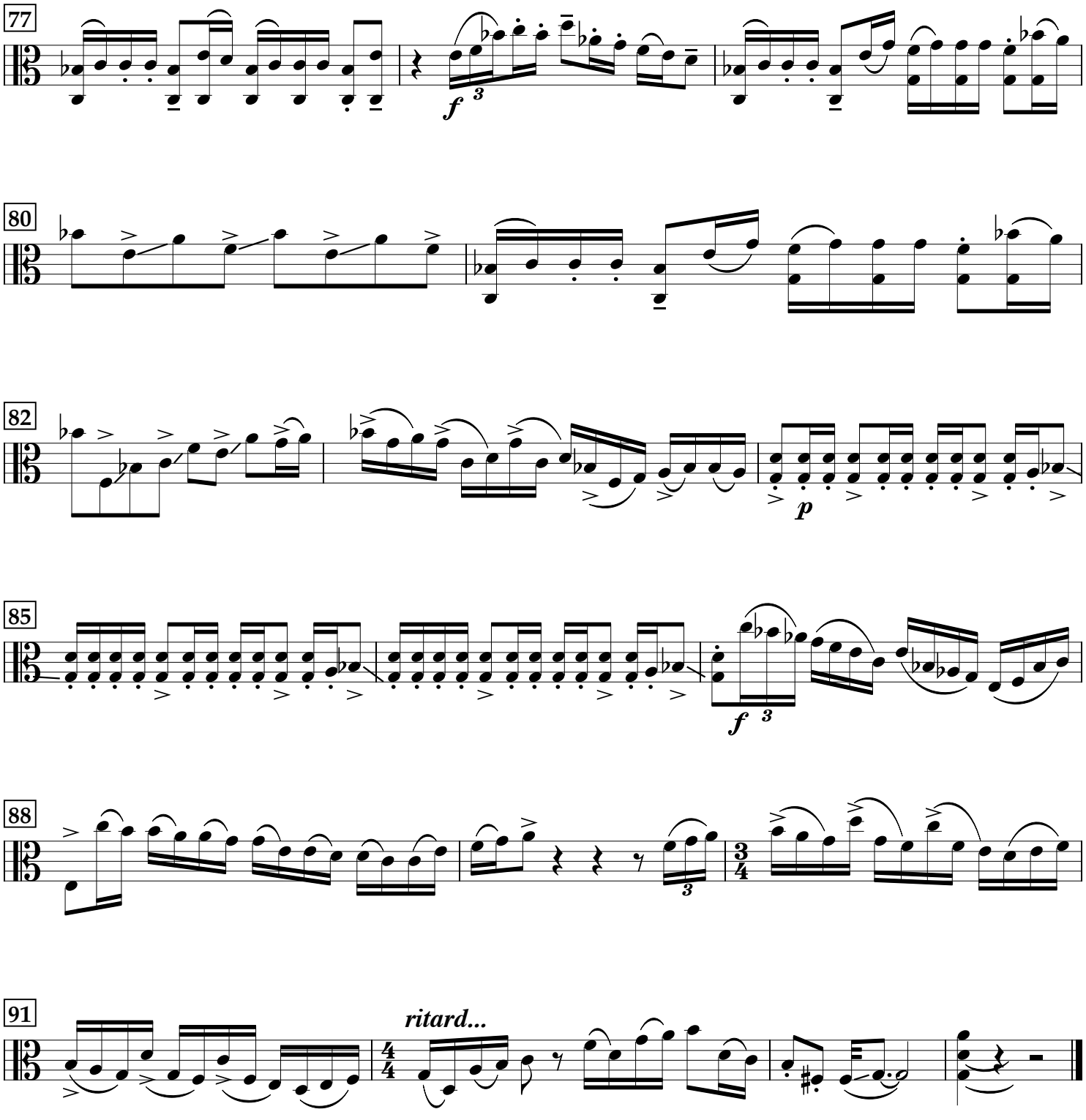
Con spirito ♩=100



Viola II, III. Mahur, p.2




57
60
62
65
68
71
A1.
74


77
f
3
80
82
p
85
f
3
88
3
4
91
ritard...
4
4